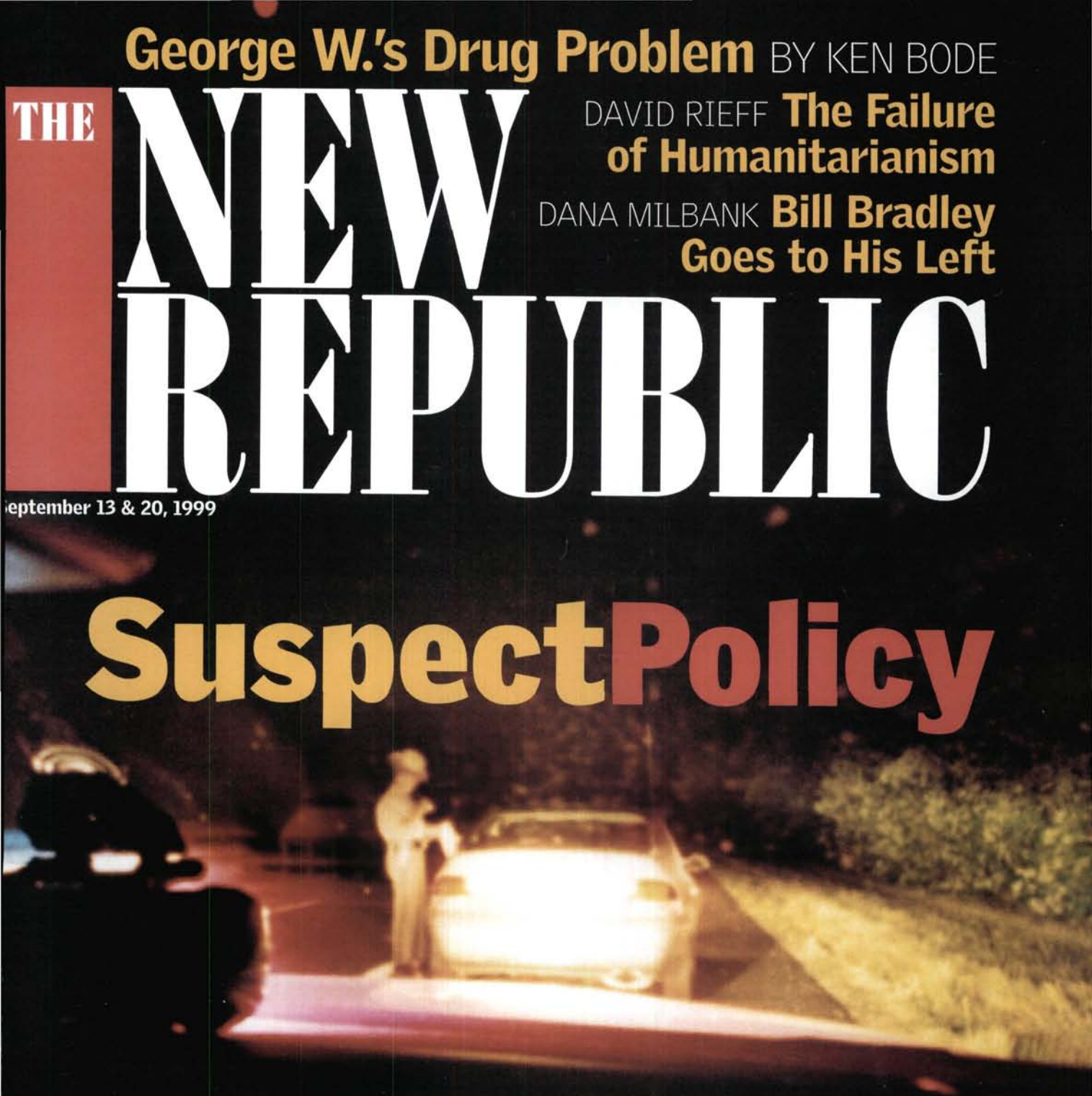
George W.'s Drug Problem BY KEN BODE

DAVID RIEFF The Failure of Humanitarianism

DANA MILBANK Bill Bradley Goes to His Left

THE NEW REPUBLIC

September 13 & 20, 1999



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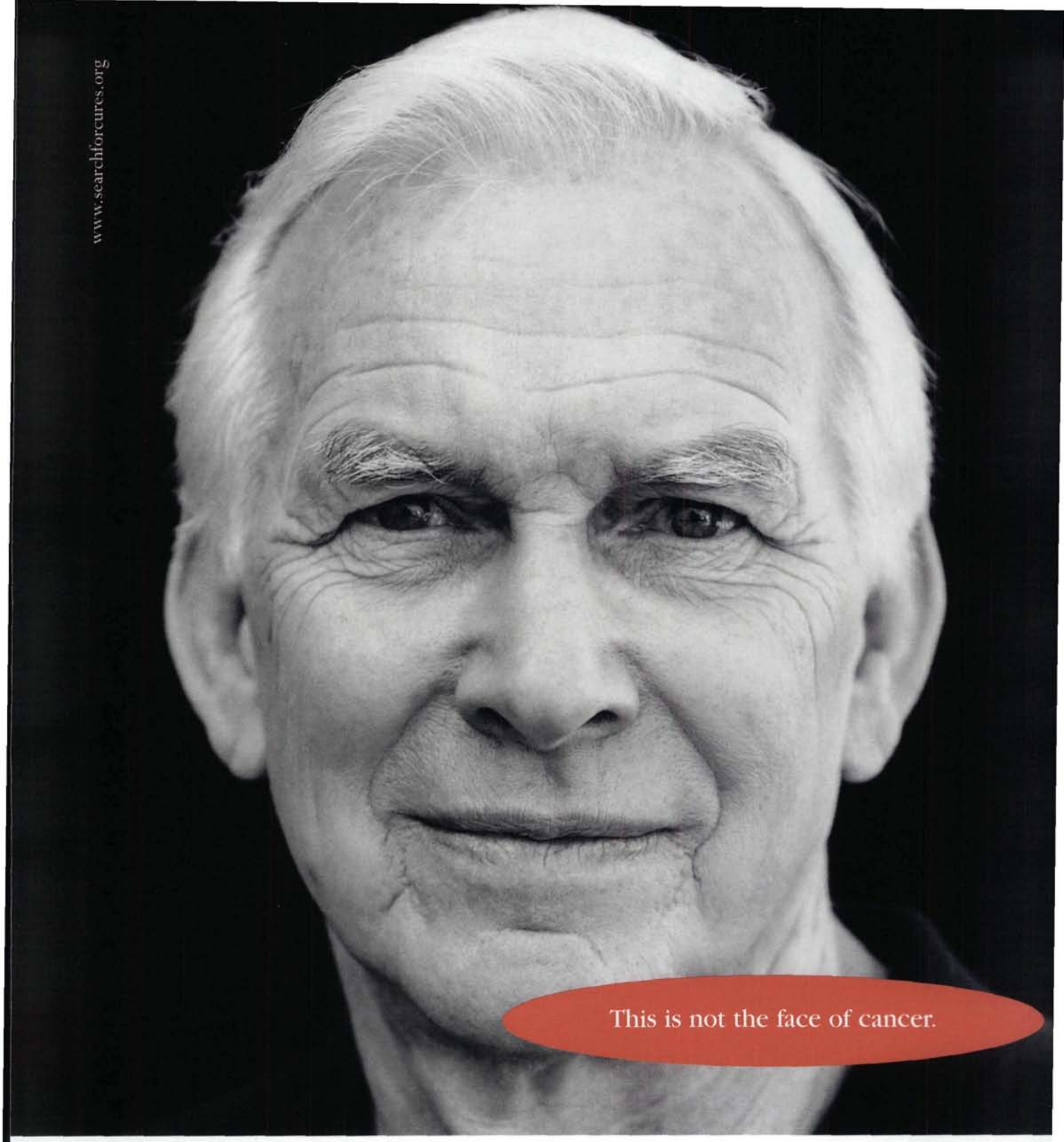

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

WASHINGTON, D.C.
SEPTEMBER 13 & 20, 1999
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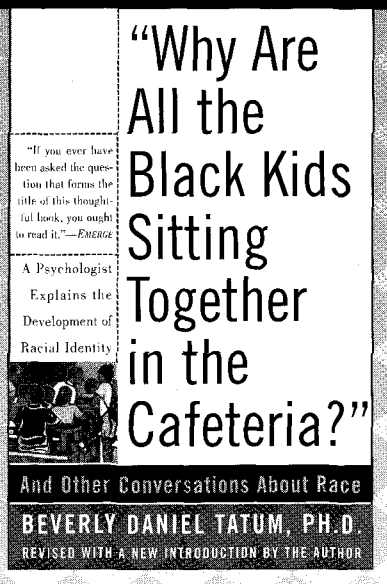
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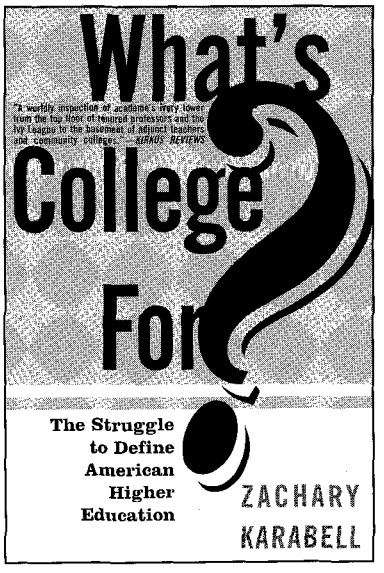
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CORRESPONDENCE

Smoking guns

TO THE EDITORS:

In the wake of the Atlanta massacre, it was inevitable that gun-control advocates would clamor about the harm that ensues when guns are misused ("Gunsmoke," by Gregg Easterbrook, August 9). Sadly, journalists are all-too-ready to jump on that bandwagon. Everyone is tired of seeing men, women, and children gunned down. But the way to prevent these tragedies is to enforce current gun laws rather than impose national gun registration or licensure, as Easterbrook suggests.

Contrary to Easterbrook's claims, the General Accounting Office found that 46.5 percent of the handgun purchase denials under the Brady law were due to paperwork errors or traffic violations (not a deniable offense under Brady) and were later approved. Since attempted purchases by felons accounted for only 44 percent of the blocked sales, more law-abiding citizens were wrongly rejected than criminals. This was more than an "inconvenience" in the cases of persons assaulted or killed while waiting for a wrongful denial of their gun purchases to be corrected.

It may surprise Easterbrook to learn that current gun regulations are analogous to car regulations in several ways. First, we do not license drivers or register cars nationally. States have different laws on car registration and qualifications for driving—which is also the situation with gun purchase, ownership, and use. So the current patchwork of 50 differing state gun laws is comparable to car regulations.

Second, we license drivers and register cars because they use public roadways. Guns are used most often on private property. If one uses a vehicle only on private property—as many trucks are used on ranches throughout the West—one neither has to register the vehicle nor be licensed to drive it.

While Easterbrook is correct that a majority of Americans, when polled, favor stricter gun laws, these numbers have fallen substantially in the past few years. A Gallup/CNN/*USA Today* poll that has tracked the question since 1990 found that in June of 1999 only 62 percent of Americans favored stricter gun laws, compared with 78 percent in 1990. Perhaps a growing number of Americans have begun to realize that gun-control laws do not make people safer.

H. STERLING BURNETT
NICOLE SCHIERECK
National Center for Policy Analysis
Dallas, Texas

GREGG EASTERBROOK REPLIES:

Polls can differ. Those taken by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, which has tracked gun-control opinions since the early 1970s, have found public support for stricter controls rising during the 1990s. As for Burnett and Schiereck's larger points, gun control has become somewhat stricter in the '90s, mainly owing to Brady rules. And, in the '90s, murder rates have declined. I wonder what that means?

Taught out

TO THE EDITORS:

Jonathan Fox mistakenly implies that the American Federation of Teachers stands in the way of ensuring that teacher's aides, known as paraprofessionals, are trained properly and used appropriately in the Title I education program ("Failing Grade," August 9). Nothing could be further from the truth. We have long advocated for more and mandatory training for aides.

Fox's opening anecdote about a paraprofessional mispronouncing "every fifth word" as she read to students is appalling. It is also a violation of the law. Title I requires aides to have appropriate skills for their work. The law encourages but does not require training, so some districts don't provide it. We hope that training will be made mandatory as part of the current reauthorization of Title I.

But we want paraprofessionals to have the sound practical training that will help them do their jobs properly. A general requirement of two years of college won't necessarily accomplish that. Someone with a two-year community college degree wouldn't automatically know how to tutor children in reading and math. A para-

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professional with specific training in reading and math instruction would.

While tutoring requires training, it is not the same as teaching. Title I also prohibits using paraprofessionals in place of teachers, and we strongly support that prohibition. It's unclear just how often this happens. Most paraprofessionals would say, if asked, that their job is to "teach" children—but that doesn't mean they take over a teacher's responsibilities. The last thing paraprofessionals want is to be paid their low wages to do a teacher's job. It's also against the law.

Fox's claim that Title I "has largely failed" is also wrong. The improved test scores among minority students that he dismisses so cavalierly are, in fact, evidence of solid progress and are largely due to Title I. This is confirmed by the most recent Department of Education evaluation of Title I.

Schools educating poor children certainly do need the best teachers—and both teachers and students in those schools can benefit from the proper, lawful use of trained aides.

SANDRA FELDMAN
President
American Federation of Teachers
Washington, D.C.

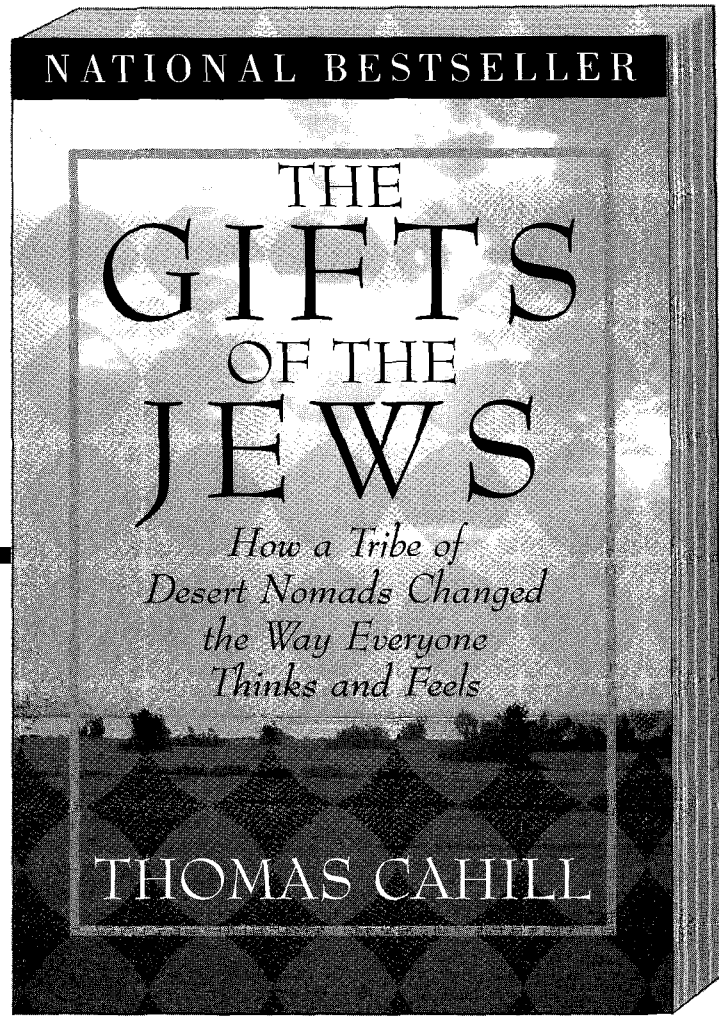
Red vs. brown

TO THE EDITORS:

In an otherwise trenchant review of François Furet's *The Passing of an Illusion*, Michael Ignatieff distorts Furet's insights into the relationship between communism and Nazism ("The Era of Error," August 9). Ignatieff writes that "Furet also helps one to understand why it remains difficult for bourgeois liberals to concede that communism was just as terrible a tyranny as Nazism." This, however, is a conclusion in which Furet's ideas, most assuredly, do not assist. While Furet acknowledges the affinities between fascism and communism, he explicitly repudiates any notion of their moral or political equivalence. Indeed, in published correspondence with the German historian Ernst Nolte, Furet rightly observes that the Nazi regime and its inexorable by-product, the gas chamber, have no parallel in modern history.

The crimes of Nazism are sui generis. The mobilization of the industrial machinery of a modern state to exterminate an entire ethnic group from the human gene pool is unprecedented. Accordingly, any effort to equate the brutality, however egregious, of Soviet Russia and its satellites with the singular iniquities of the Holocaust constitutes a rank perversion of the historical truth and a contortion of Furet's work.

MATTHEW S. SCHWEBER
New York, New York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FROM WASHINGTON

Devolution

ISN'T EVOLUTION WONDERFUL? Just consider the many different ways natural selection has helped various species protect themselves against danger. Cats have claws. Porcupines have bristles. And some politicians have antennae that can sense the approach of a difficult issue of principle from miles away, leaving them plenty of time to scurry into the nearest patch of tall grass.

Or so it would seem, judging by the equivocal responses the presidential candidates have given to the Kansas state Board of Education's decision to purge all mention of evolution (and the Big Bang theory) from the state's recommended science curriculum and standardized tests. Henceforth it will be up to each of the state's 304 local school districts to determine how much time to spend on the biblical "view" of life's origins on the one hand and the Darwinian "view" on the other. Yes, teaching microevolution—how individual species change due to human intervention or short-term environmental changes—is still officially approved. After all, what would Kansas be without all those carefully bred steers and hardy strains of wheat?

I don't think it's possible to be outraged enough by this ludicrous decree. To be sure, the worst-case scenario—an outright statewide ban on teaching evolution and the substitution of crackpot "creation science"—is unlikely to materialize. As *The New York Times* has reported, many Kansas school districts will exercise their right to keep on teaching evolution, a "point of view" (the *Times*' own amazingly gutless phrase) that is supported by a massive body of material evidence and that undergirds much of the modern revolution in life-saving medical care to boot. (Or would the Kansas Board of Education like to opt out of the coming wave of gene therapies for fatal congenital illnesses?) No, what Kansas will have instead is a second-worst-case scenario, in which some students get a twenty-first-century education, others get a fourteenth-century education, and everyone is hobbled by confusion and bureaucratic hassles.

Yet the candidates appear to believe that even the mildest expression of disgust about this would be too risky. Sure, we expected wing nuts like Gary Bauer and Pat Buchanan to heap sympathy on the Kansas decision. But what about purportedly more sensible Republicans like George W. Bush and Elizabeth Dole? Kansas's own moderate Republican governor is unabashedly livid at the board's action. But Bush practically endorsed it, muttering, "I believe children ought to be exposed to different theories about how the world started." Dole, on CBS's "Face the Nation," stammered platitudes about the need to teach both the Bible and evolution before throwing up her hands: "I'm going to leave this as I'm a person of strong faith. This is a state issue."

And the Democrats? Not much better. When TNR called Bill Bradley's campaign for a comment, spokesman Tony Wyche said, "It is safe to say that Senator Bradley would have opposed that decision"—and made it clear that the senator would have no more to say publicly on the matter. So Bradley's for evolution, but he's not a nut about it. Over at Gore HQ, spokesman Roger Salazar confirmed that the veep neither condemns nor endorses the Kansas board's decision. Gore believes both that "evolution should be taught in schools" and that "matters of curriculum should be decided by local school boards," Salazar told me.

Gore's waffle is especially disappointing, both because he's running as the candidate of the ultramodern age (it's pretty obvious *he* doesn't question the factuality of evolution) and because he's about the only candidate who has actually tried to think through the relationship between religion and science for himself. His 1992 book, *Earth in the Balance*, contains a passage in which Gore suggests that the Big Bang and Genesis can be reconciled by positing the existence of a divine intelligence prior to the Big Bang. Various versions of this interesting compromise between scientific materialism and biblical literalism are gaining currency among both theologians and scientists (see "Science Sees the Light," by Gregg Easterbrook, October 12, 1998). Gore could have taken the Kansas debacle as an occasion to lead a little national discussion about such matters—i.e. to make the case that the Bible and evolution are not mutually exclusive "points of view" and that, therefore, believing parents needn't let themselves be bullied by the "creation science" crowd. But he passed.

The Kansas flap is useful in one way, though: as a reminder of just how sprawling and decentralized our system of public education is. The federal government's power is pretty much limited to whatever indirect leverage it can acquire through subsidizing teacher salaries, school construction, and the like. When the American system works well, it produces public schools that are relatively responsive to the needs of the populations they serve. When it works badly, the results range from the squalor of Washington, D.C., inner-city schools to the mental hijacking of an entire state's schoolchildren by sectarian zealots.

But, by and large, the voters are wary of changing this way of doing business. Thus, the presidential candidates bow at the altar of "local control." In so doing, they reveal the emptiness of their own promises to save education—whether their solution is to free local schools from the purportedly iron grip of Washington or to push grand new reform legislation through Congress. (The Kansas state school board's attack on the teaching of truthful biology certainly lowers my hopes that we'll ever realize President Clinton's dream of an effective, universally accepted set of national standards for student knowledge and achievement.)

But the presidency can be a bully pulpit, a platform from which to rally public support for the best new ideas in education and to rally opposition to the worst ones. You would have thought that purging a huge body of scientific knowledge from the required curriculum of much of an American state would fit into the latter category. And you would have thought that at least one of our current crop of would-be presidents could have managed to say so—loud and clear.

CHARLES LANE

Self-correcting mechanism: In a recent Washington Diarist about the death of John F. Kennedy Jr. ("Lost Horizon," August 9), I recounted how my father had been affected by the 1968 assassination of Robert F. Kennedy. I wrote that I remembered he had been in Nebraska working for Kennedy in that primary on the night of the assassination, but, as reader Mark Roffman of New Haven, Connecticut, was kind enough to point out, this couldn't be right, because Kennedy was shot just after midnight on June 5, 1968, and the Nebraska primary was three weeks earlier. I suppose I could try to pass the buck ("Despite repeated phone calls, my father refused to speak to me for the article...."), but the error is all mine. For the record, my father did work in Nebraska but was in California until shortly before the assassination, at which point he came home to Washington. The rest of my childhood memories checked out, according to two sources: Dad, and Mom.—*CL* ■

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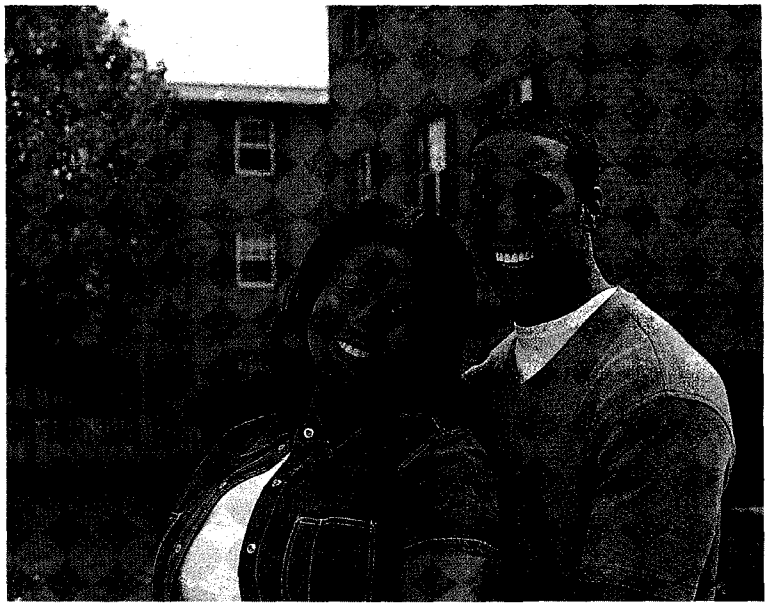

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CAMPAIGN JOURNAL

Leaning Left

DES MOINES, IOWA

BILL BRADLEY WILL formally launch his presidential campaign on September 8 in his boyhood hometown of Crystal City, Missouri. Then he'll "lead a caravan of supporters" to Keokuk, Iowa, 200 miles north. If you're planning to join the procession, the directions are simple: expect Bradley to turn left—often.

That, at least, is the impression the former senator has been giving. When asked on an Iowa radio show how his positions differ from Al Gore's, he volunteered that he is much tougher on gun control, much stronger on campaign finance reform, and a more enthusiastic supporter of abortion rights. The interviewer concluded: "You are a clear, unabashed, liberal Democrat."

Bradley demurred, but his recent words do convey a sense that he's been hanging out a lot with Senator Paul Wellstone. He says he'll release a universal health care plan that will be "raw meat" for his critics. Asked in Iowa about the budget surplus, he said he'd spend it on health care, child poverty, debt reduction, and a "rainy day" fund. In other words, he wouldn't cut current taxes by a dime—which puts him at odds with most members of his own party. When another questioner criticized welfare reform, Bradley responded, "You and I are on the same wavelength. I was one of ten or twelve who voted against it."

His crowds, packed with liberal activists, eat it up. "He's hitting all my buttons," said Vernon Stone after listening to Bradley in Ames—a town Stone identified as "the most liberal spot in Iowa."

For better or worse, Bradley has decided to attack Gore from the left. Many in the Democratic base will view this as heroic and call Bradley the party's savior. Others will see it as a cynical tactic and call Bradley a spoiler. Both sides have a point.

It's not implausible to view Bradley as the purist who can save the Democrats from the scandalous Clinton administration. "Hundreds of people have come up to me and said, 'I'm an independent, or a Republican, I'd vote for you, I wouldn't vote for him,'" Bradley likes to say. He's right: I hear it all the time in Iowa, in New Hampshire, and elsewhere. Also, Bradley's themes are favorites of Democrats of all stripes. His proposal for public financing of campaigns is strong (and is something Gore can't top because of his baggage), and he is the only candidate other than George W. Bush who talks much about poor kids. Also, his leftward tack is shrewd. Iowa is in a farm crisis, and, in New Hampshire, a Gore man admits, "there is still room for a liberal run."

On the other hand, Bradley's campaign could recreate the intraparty rift Democrats thought they'd avoided when Dick Gephardt backed out of a run and endorsed Gore. Bradley is, in a sense, giving liberals false hope that their agenda is possible (remember when Clinton and Gore tried universal health care in 1994?). His move to the left also makes him less electable were he to win the nomination. The most likely outcome is that he and Gore will spend each other into poverty. When summer 2000 rolls around, whoever winds up with the nomination will then be outspent the way Clinton outspent Bob Dole in '96.

Bradley, in a brief interview, dismissed these worries. Is he moving left? "No. Some people will say I'm on the left, some people will say I'm on the right, and some people will say I'm in the center." Will he and Gore make each other too weak to win? "Whichever candidate emerges will be stronger because of the competition. You benefit from the rat-a-tat-tat." Gina Glantz, Bradley's campaign manager, says she doesn't worry about repeating Dole's spring money woes. "If you continually play the last election this time, it's almost a guarantee that you'll be wrong," she says.

Bradley's allies don't seem to mind the characterization of their man as left of Gore. "There is this huge void because the vice president has not connected to progressive Democrats," Wellstone told *The Wall Street Journal*. "I think that will be real important for the nomination." But Bradley's aides bristle at the idea that the candidate's liberal positions are, well, a matter of positioning. "Bill has been talking about race for twenty years, he has been talking about women in poverty for twenty years," says adviser Anita Dunn.

OK, I'll buy that. Bradley, to his credit, hasn't wavered from his free-trading views, even though that would be an easy way to steal union support. And when Bradley finally talks about foreign policy, he may try to outflank Gore on the right, aides say. (One possible attack: the administration's indulgence of Boris Yeltsin's Russia.) If anything, one could argue, it's Gore who has tacked left on gun control and, next, health care, in order to remove the daylight between himself and Bradley. Still, there's a happy coincidence between the positions Bradley highlights now and the need to win liberals. Gore's people concede that Bradley already has the Tsongas Democrats: white, wealthy, and guilt-ridden. This accounts for a quarter of the Democratic electorate. He now needs pieces of the Gephardt-Jackson wing, which explains why he visited Al Sharpton's headquarters on August 23.

The liberal strategy is a bit awkward for Bradley because his record is centrist. He made much of a Gore statement opposing federal funding of abortion ("That's a difference—I support a woman's right to choose," he said), but the Gore campaign insists this was an error made by a junior flak. Bradley points out that he doesn't accept any PAC money, but he doesn't mention that Gore refuses it, too. Nor does he mention that the average contribution to his campaign, $605, is greater than Bush's $480—and quadruple Gore's $143.

Yet the liberal course, though divisive and risky, may be necessary. Gore has signed up the vast majority of the more than 500 "superdelegates," the elected and party officials who have about 20 percent of the votes at the convention. And, because Democratic primaries are based on proportional representation, Bradley, in theory, could get 60 percent of the primary vote and still lose the nomination. Bradley's hope is to beat the front-runner, decisively, in Iowa or New Hampshire or both, prompting a revolt of superdelegates. It's a long shot, but his aides are undaunted. "The only thing certain about presidential politics is its uncertainty," says Glantz.

Bradley and his advisers don't see themselves as spoilers. The Bradley aides are more passionate than Gore's staff, and they seem to hold a quasi-religious belief that, just this once, message will defeat method. Whereas one Gore adviser told me the nomination is more about tactics than message, Glantz says the reverse is true. Bradley himself tells audiences, "I'm trying to do this in a different way."

But there's a fine line between idealism and naïveté. Bradley is filling liberal hearts with hope, which earns him more enthusiastic crowds than Gore's. But, in the end, it's about who has the most votes, and Bradley's liberal supporters may not realize that. Sonja Roberts, a Des Moines community activist who hosted a Bradley visit, pronounced herself enchanted after his speech on her front porch. But, when I asked whether she worried that Bradley and Gore would carve up the party, handing the White House to a Republican, she lost some of her spirit. "That's a really good question," she said after some thought, "because I can see it happening."

DANA MILBANK

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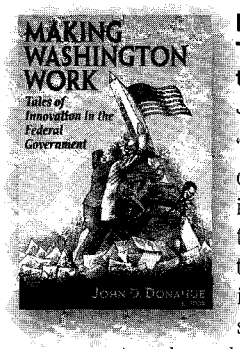

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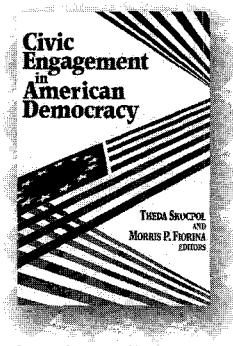

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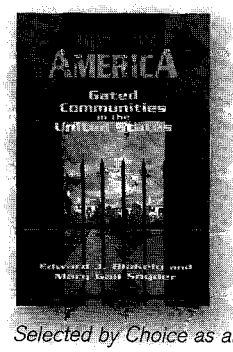

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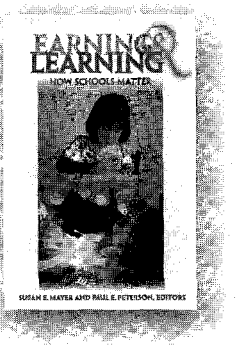

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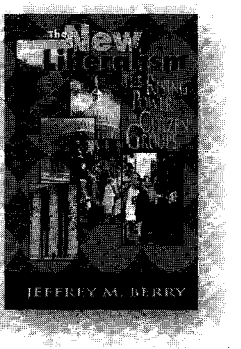

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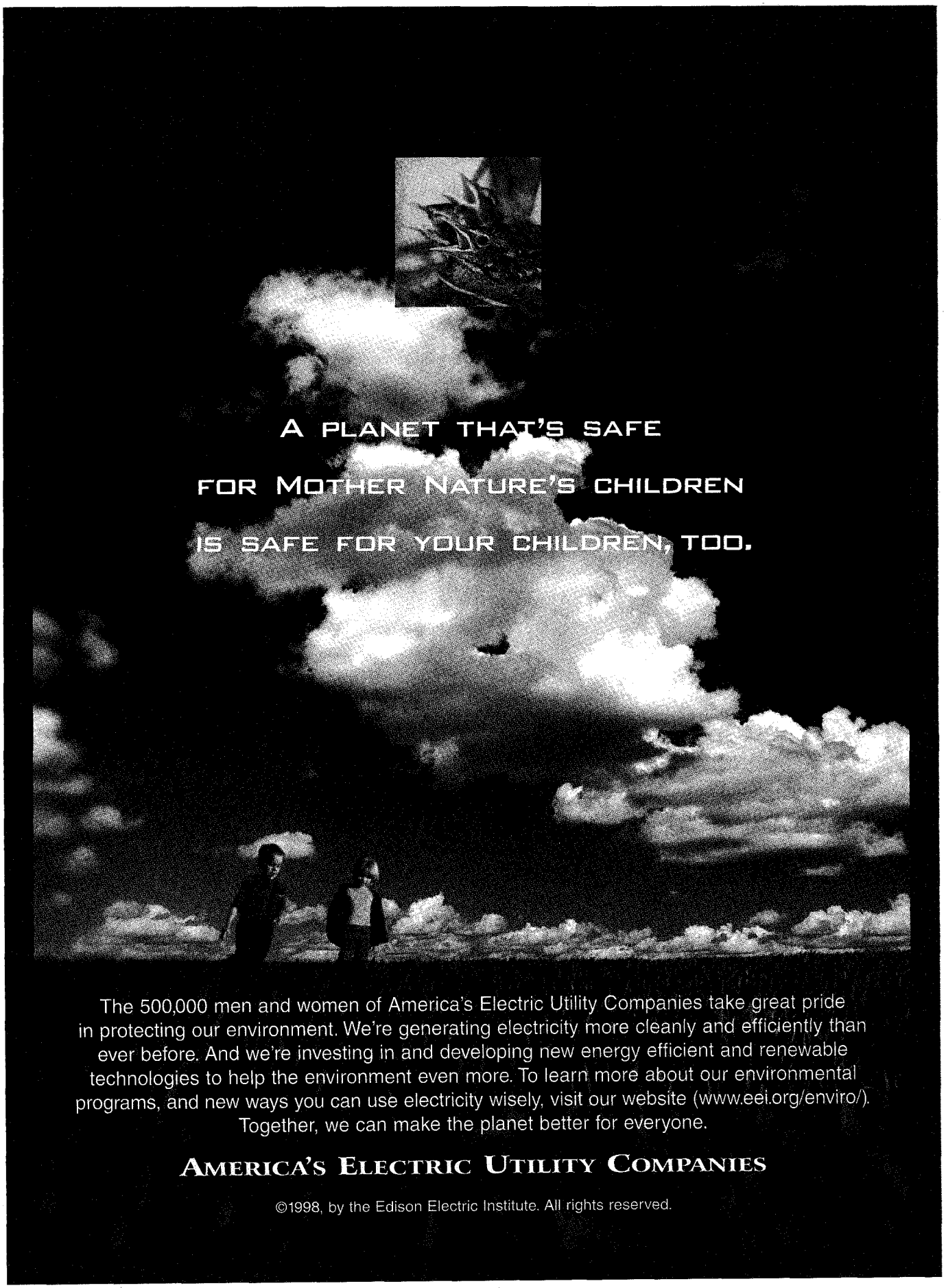

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Masters of Disasters

ON AUGUST 17, less than 24 hours after a massive earthquake rocked Turkey, the 70 members of an urban search and rescue team from Fairfax County, Virginia, were in the air en route to Istanbul. A week later, when the rescue team's members returned home to the United States, they were able to reflect on a job well done. Although in some previous rescue efforts the team was able to pull only bodies from the rubble, the rescue team's prompt arrival in Turkey allowed its members to save a few lives this time. "When things started to wind down, you start to think that you did get out four people," one weary rescuer, Chris Mantos, told *The Washington Post*. "This was the first time we got to do our job."

Indeed, while the earthquake in Turkey was a tragedy of massive proportions, and while Turks were sharply critical of the bumbling response of their own government and army, the international relief effort that the earthquake sparked has demonstrated that the international community's capability to respond to natural disasters has improved. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, 35 nations and dozens of international organizations sent more than 2,200 rescue personnel to Turkey; other countries and charities sent aid in the form of supplies and money. Most importantly, the relief effort is being coordinated by the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)—and the coordination appears to be paying off. When the Turkish government failed to mount appropriate rescue operations, the international teams, working together, stepped into the breach. In one memorable instance, rescue teams from France, Mexico, Italy, and Kyrgyzstan worked jointly to try to save people trapped under rubble in the town of Golcuk.

This is new. In fact, until the early 1970s, there was no coordination of international relief efforts at all. But, after badly bungled relief efforts in response to an earthquake in Peru in 1968 and the East Pakistan cyclone of 1970, the U.N. General Assembly, in 1971, created the United Nations Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO) to coordinate disaster relief operations. Unfortunately, UNDRO was worse than useless. Some of the most notorious examples of uncoordinated relief efforts—such as the response to the 1976 Guatemalan earthquake, when international donors sent so much of the same medicine to the country that more than 100 tons of it eventually had to be buried—occurred on the UNDRO bureaucracy's watch.

A major reason for this was UNDRO's mandate. It wasn't intended to be another relief agency; instead, it was supposed to serve as a clearinghouse for relief operations, assessing a country's disaster relief needs and then lining up other countries and charities to meet them. More often than not, though, UNDRO put up a bureaucratic barrier to effective relief efforts. To obtain help from UNDRO, a country seeking disaster relief had to make a formal request to the United Nations. Then UNDRO, which was based in Geneva, would dispatch an investigator to that country to examine its needs. Subsequently, UNDRO would consult its computer to find out which nations or nongovernmental organizations were best able to meet those needs. Only then would formal requests for aid be issued. Meanwhile, disaster victims suffered.

The United Nations finally abolished UNDRO in the early '90s and established OCHA in its place. Like its predecessor, OCHA serves as a clearinghouse for disaster relief efforts. But, unlike UNDRO, it does so without a lot of bureaucratic dawdling, as the operation in Turkey demonstrates. Moreover, before disasters occur, OCHA works to ensure that each country's designated international disaster teams (the United States, for instance, has two such squads, one based in Dade County, Florida, and the other based in Fairfax County) share certain standards and have practiced together in simulated emergencies.

Still, while OCHA may be better than its predecessor, it falls short of what's most needed to conduct successful international disaster relief operations: a permanent standing international disaster force, something we have been calling for since 1985 (see "Griefbusters," October 21, 1985). Unlike OCHA, which can coordinate aid from countries and private organizations but can't actually dispense aid on its own, a permanent standing force, under an international command structure, would be able to deploy itself and carry out its own operations. While the force would be composed of personnel from around the world, its international character would likely lessen national rivalries—rivalries that surfaced even in Turkey, when teams from some countries concentrated their efforts on fellow countrymen trapped in the rubble. That was one of the few discordant notes in the international rescue effort in Turkey, but it was a reminder that, no matter how far international relief efforts have come, more progress can be made. ■

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NOTEBOOK

FRENCH KISS: Diplomats expect France to open debate in the United Nations this fall over the United States' continued bombing of Iraq—pushing for a resumption of a U.N. weapons-inspection regime along the lines of the UNSCOM fiasco and, presumably, the eventual lifting of sanctions against Iraq altogether. France's eagerness to welcome Iraq back into the global economy is at least partly motivated by its desire to recoup the billions Iraq owes French companies from deals made before the 1991 Gulf war. Of course, France is hardly likely to own up to that. Instead, expect France to argue that the current sanctions harm not Saddam Hussein but his people. Obviously the French haven't read a recently released report on the subject—by the United Nations! It seems that, even though Iraq's revenues from the oil it is permitted to sell to finance food and medicine imports have increased in recent months, Baghdad has actually been spending *less* on food for women and children. Meanwhile, the government subjects incoming medical supplies to lengthy "quality tests," creating unconscionable delays in getting tuberculosis and diphtheria vaccines to the Kurdish population of northern Iraq, toward which Saddam has never been terribly friendly anyway. The French can make whatever opportunistic arguments they want; the fact remains that Saddam, not international sanctions, is the main cause of the agonies of the Iraqi people.

BORING HEADLINE WATCH:

Questionable Mergers in Aluminum

The sudden consolidation in the worldwide aluminum industry raises troubling antitrust issues that must be addressed by regulators in both Europe and North America before the mergers are [illegible] to proceed. At a minimum, [illegible] mergers require careful scrutiny, and [illegible] be blocked. There is a risk that European [illegible] might be persuaded that the APA deal [illegible] offset Alcoa, while Alcoa tells the Just [illegible] ment that it must come to [illegible]

—THE NEW YORK TIMES, August 20

MORE NEWS FROM TURTLE BAY: The U.N. General Assembly has never been known for an abundance of warmth or respect for Israel. But, this September, the assembly will demonstrate disdain not only for Israel's citizens but for members of the Jewish faith in general. Although it had literally months during which to choose a date for the opening day of this year's session, the assembly picked September 20—which happens to be Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. Israel, American Jewish groups, and the United States have all implored the United Nations to wait until September 21, pointing out that the organization is, after all, closed for both Christmas and Good Friday as well as for the two Muslim holidays Id al-Adha and Id al-Fitr. But the assembly has refused to budge. (To his credit, President Clinton has announced that he will not give a speech on the first day of the new session, as is customary, and will instead wait to address the assembly on the second day.) According to some reports, the assembly members' intransigence was at least partly due to their irritation at the United States for failing to pay the $1.69 billion in back dues it owes the U.N. This, if true, is myopic. Congress is unlikely to release the funds unless it is assured that the U.N. has finally kicked its America- and Israel-bashing habits. The assembly's latest antic suggests it hasn't.

Starwood Posts 40% Net Decline For 2nd Period

—THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, August 6

Starwood reports profits rise 33 percent

—NEWARK STAR-LEDGER, same day

(Thanks to John Peter Suarez, Sewell, N.J.)

WEST WIND: What can one say about a book whose author submits that its "words, sentences, and paragraphs are but linguistic marks that track my journey of blood, sweat, and tears, which tries to achieve and enact the best of what it means to be human, modern and American"? Or a book with this dedication: "To the Memory and Legacy of My Modern Artistic Soul Mates: John Coltrane, Federico García Lorca, Franz Kafka, Paul Celan, Tennessee Williams, Giacomo Leopardi, Samuel Beckett, Sarah Vaughan, Muriel Rukeyser, Thomas Hardy, Nikos Kazantzakis, Toni Morrison—and above all—Anton Chekhov"? This is no common soul—its "sense of the absurdity and incongruity of the world is closer to the Gnosticism of Valentinus, Luria or Monoimos than that of historic religious orthodoxies—yet, unlike them, it retains a deep sense of history. My intellectual lineage goes more through Schopenhauer, Tolstoy, Rilke, Melville, Lorca, Kafka, Celan, Beckett, Soyinka, O'Neill, Kazantzakis, Morrison, and, above all, Chekhov (all great dramatic poets of death, courage and compassion) than most theologians and philosophers." Not a common soul, and not a humble one. "My Chekhovian Christian viewpoint is idiosyncratic and iconoclastic," writes Cornel West in *The Cornel West Reader*, edited by Cornel West. Chekhovian Christianity? He explains: "I find the incomparable works of Anton Chekhov—the best singular body by a modern artist—to be the wisest and deepest interpretations of what human beings confront in their daily struggles." A hero in his own eyes, he adds that "my Chekhovian Christian way of being is peppered by skepticism, but not paralyzed by it. I live on the treacherous and tortuous terrain between doubt and faith, at the bloody crossroads of despair and hope." The essays in this book will be familiar to serious students of the enfeeblement of intellectual life in America. The really precious bits are the little prefaces that the editor has written to each of the author's essays: "Of all my books, *Prophesy Deliverance!* remains my favorite"; "If all of my writings but one had to disappear, this essay is the one piece I hope would survive"; "It is one of the few signature pieces I have written"; "This piece, published in 1982, is a pivotal work in my corpus..."; "It is one of the most requested essays in my corpus"; "My audience base rose quickly after this interview"; "I see in retrospect that in 1984 my struggle with the tragicomic character of black life and the human predicament was central to my work"; and so on. The book will be published by Basic Books this fall. The author is a University Professor at Harvard—the university's most distinguished academic appointment. ■

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George W.'s drug problem.

To Tell the Truth

By Ken Bode

We appear to have reached an impasse in the matter of Texas Governor George W. Bush and cocaine. Ever since Bush first ran for governor in 1994, his political opponents and the press have been demanding to know whether he has ever used illegal drugs. And, for just as long, Bush has been refusing to answer, arguing that what he did in his reckless youth is nobody's business. Bush was aided in his first Texas campaign by the fact that his Democratic opponent, then-Governor Ann Richards, had well-publicized substance abuse issues of her own.

But, now that Bush is running for the presidency, the first cracks have appeared in his carefully maintained wall. When asked by *The Dallas Morning News* whether he could honestly answer "no" to the standard government security clearance question—"Have you used drugs in the past seven years?"—Bush said that he could. When he realized this might imply that he had used drugs as recently as eight years ago, Bush told reporters that in 1989 he could have passed the 15-year "no prior use" standard that applied during his father's administration. That is, no drug use after 1974. And it is at this new defensive line that Bush is making his stand. Asked if he had used drugs prior to 1974, he reverted to his stock none-of-your-business answer.

Critics have called these responses Clintonian. But whereas Clinton told the whopper about how he "didn't inhale" and swore that he "did not have sexual relations with that woman," it's doubtful that Bush has actually lied about his past drug use. Indeed, by addressing only questions that he can answer in the negative, he is steering clear of the lie trap into which Clinton plunged. But Bush's answers are Clintonian in another sense. Just as the president and his wife appeared on "60 Minutes" in 1992 to acknowledge that Clinton had "caused pain in [his] marriage" but didn't explicitly admit his adultery, Bush—by refusing to say whether he used drugs before 1974—basically is signaling to the public that he did indeed once use drugs but then asking us to spare him the details.

Unfortunately for the governor, this revised position is untenable. Eventually, he's going to have to answer the drug question once and for all. Here's why.

Most of the speculation about whether Bush has ever used drugs has assumed that the drug in question is cocaine. To be sure, major news organizations, including *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*, have probed the subject and come up with no evidence so far. ("No low-hanging fruit," as one *Journal* executive put it to me.) But, if Bush had used marijuana—a drug that plenty of pols, including both Democratic candidates, Bill Bradley and Al Gore, have admitted they used in the past—he'd almost undoubtedly have fessed up by now.

If cocaine was the young and irresponsible Bush's drug of choice, then other people would probably know about it. Coke does not magically appear in your pocket. Someone either gives it or sells it to you. Either way, as with adultery, there is at least one other witness. Also, in the young Bush's elite circles—Andover, Yale, Harvard—coke tended to be a social drug available at parties, where people used it in groups. So, chances are there actually were multiple witnesses.

Notwithstanding the *Journal*'s and the *Post*'s inconclusive efforts so far, if Bush indeed did use drugs, it's only a matter of time before the press hunts one of these witnesses down—or before one of the witnesses hunts down the press. It's not as if the media is going to let this issue go away. Ever since the

VINT LAWRENCE

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1987 Gary Hart-Donna Rice stakeout, the press has had few qualms about probing the private lives of presidential frontrunners. And that is doubly true for the nonestablishment press. Beginning with Hart, the tabloid press—print, television, and, now, Internet—has made itself a constant, inescapable presence in political campaigns. This crowd does not play by the conventional rules of journalism. These reporters use unconfirmed and single-source stories and are more than willing to pay for news. They hold nothing back, but it must also be said that when they publish it first, they often also get it right. Remember: it was *The Star*, a supermarket tabloid, that broke the news in 1992 about Gennifer Flowers's affair with Clinton.

Bush's opponents will also do their part to keep the story alive. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle has already made it clear that at least some powerful Democrats think Bush's drug record is fair game. It's a safe bet that folks like Pat Buchanan and Gary Bauer do, too. Presidential nominating contests are high-stakes, winner-take-all games. In 1992, the Clinton campaign paid private investigator Jack Palladino more than $100,000 to dig up dirt on women who might be tempted to come forward with their stories of sexual liaisons with the governor of Arkansas. Such private eyes are available in both partisan stripes, and $100,000 is carfare for a guy like Steve Forbes—or any rich Republican who might act independently.

SINCE THE TRUTH will almost undoubtedly come out, Bush should just spill the beans now. To be sure, this will make him look like a hypocrite—in two ways. First, Bush has based much of his campaign on how his biography shows that he'll be a more decent and dignified occupant of the Oval Office than Clinton has been. To this end, he has boasted about the fact that he's been faithful to his wife, and he's been fairly candid about how, after a boozy youth, he gave up alcohol at the age of 40 and simultaneously committed himself to God. If Bush admitted that he's done drugs, particularly cocaine, it would tarnish his biography. Such an admission would also highlight Bush's hypocrisy as a policy-maker: as governor, he has cultivated a "tough on crime" image, and two years ago he signed a law in Texas authorizing jail time for first-time drug offenders.

But there could also be some benefits. First, Bush would be answering a question that most Americans think is legitimate, according to public opinion surveys. But, by the same token, respondents in these polls say that they're inclined not to consider a few long-ago instances of coke use relevant to Bush's fitness for office. Also, Bush might get some credit for coming clean, at least.

In fact, the general thinking of the American public about admissions of substance abuse and even addiction by candidates for high office has become gradually more and more permissive over the years, beginning with attitudes toward alcoholism. In the '60s, a time when the state of Iowa did not permit the sale of liquor by the drink, a former truck driver named Harold Hughes, who also happened to be a recovering alcoholic, ran for governor of the state. Voters found strength of character in his honesty about his addiction and elected him to the state house three times, then to the U.S. Senate. Hughes used the respect and authority he gained to remodel Iowa's alcohol policies. He left office a revered figure.

In the 1988 presidential race, both Al Gore and Bruce Babbitt admitted to having experimented with marijuana. It's doubtful that it cost either of them a single vote. Clinton, by contrast, went from claiming to have "never [broken] the laws of my country" to the now-infamous "I didn't inhale," thus indelibly branding himself a weasel. The charges surrounding Bush might have some interesting fallout for other candidates. A highly critical biography of Gore written by former ABC News reporter Bob Zelnick (and published by right-wing Regnery) charges that the vice president used marijuana recreationally well after he was out of college. If the Bush drug issue persists, might the press feel prompted to revisit this history, too?

THERE IS YET another contemporary precedent for George W. to ponder during the days ahead. Gary Johnson, the Republican governor of New Mexico, has admitted to the voters of his state that he was a drug offender in his youth, having used both marijuana and a little cocaine during his college days. Johnson actually told New Mexicans they had a right to know. They have elected him twice since then, and Johnson uses his own story in calling for a rethinking of America's punitive drug policies.

Finally, Bush has to talk because we don't want another president to enter the Oval Office burdened by a potentially damaging secret. Back in 1991, the late Ron Brown, who was then Democratic National Committee chairman, reviewed his party's prospects with me, focusing particularly on Clinton, who, he thought, had the best shot at winning but also carried the largest risks. Clinton would be a strong, outside-the-Beltway candidate, a successful Southern governor with a moderate record. But Brown feared that, if Clinton were the nominee, the Republicans would wait until October and then sink the entire Democratic ticket with stories about Clinton's womanizing tendencies. As it turned out, the Republicans didn't drop that bomb, but the womanizing rumors trailed Clinton to the White House, where, eventually, they were proven, with the results we all know.

No, it's not a perfect analogy, because it's unlikely that George W. Bush would ever use illegal drugs of any kind while in the White House. But if he has used them in the past, some witness or witnesses (or even potentially false witnesses) to this felony would suddenly have incredible leverage over the leader of the free world. You can imagine the conversation: "Mr. President, I'm sorry, but I'm not so well-off right now and these tabloids are just throwing money at me." Monica Lewinsky had that kind of power over Clinton; she just didn't exercise it too heavy-handedly. But Flowers certainly did when Clinton was governor of Arkansas—and it helped get her a job in his administration. This is just one of many reasons why it has always been a good rule in politics to tell voters the truth before you are forced to do so. It's a rule George W. would be well advised to obey now. ■

KEN BODE is dean of the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University.

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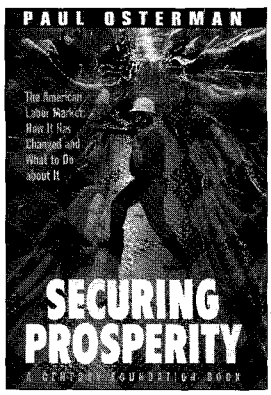

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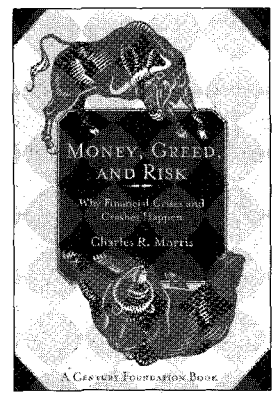

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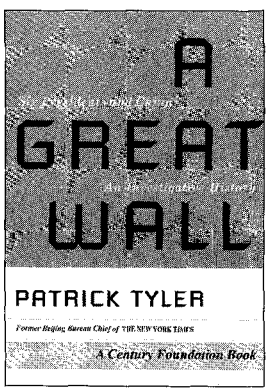

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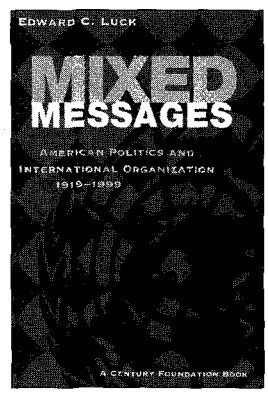

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What do background checks really check?

Just Asking

By Reuel Marc Gerecht

The ostensible reason George W. Bush finally dropped—albeit only partly—his blanket refusal to discuss whether he has ever used illegal drugs is that a reporter asked him about it in the context of the background checks required of all administration personnel. While it was unfair for the press to quiz him about every detail of his private life, Bush seemed to reason, it is only fair for a would-be president to let the public know whether he could pass the same security checks that would be required of those who wished to serve under him. In the media frenzy that ensued over his answer—Bush said he could pass both the current seven-year drug-free requirement and the more stringent 15-year standard applied during his father's presidency—one key question went unasked: Just how meaningful are security checks, anyway?

It's a question more than a few officers of the Central Intelligence Agency have pondered. With the possible exception of the folks in the National Security Agency, America's eavesdropping bureaucracy, no officials are more probed and poked by prying security types than those in the CIA. Yet, as the more outrageous examples of internal betrayal at the CIA in recent years demonstrate, the issues that the background check focuses on are not necessarily good predictors of traitorous behavior. And, if the hyperstrict checks applied to CIA employees can't divine the truth, why should we expect the less-thorough checks performed on other government personnel to be any better?

The background check is in some ways an expression of America's egalitarian ethic. Even after the British discovered that graduates of Cambridge University's Trinity College had developed an impressive track record of treason against the crown, they were reluctant to institute security review procedures that weren't class-conscious. Coming from the right school and family remained decisive factors in admission to Britain's secret services. The early CIA had more than a bit of the same philosophy. Ivy League-educated Wall Street lawyers played a pivotal role in the agency's founding, and discreet Ivy League recruiting networks remained important sources of employees until the early 1960s. But the elite were never exempted from serious security review. James Jesus Angleton, the brilliant, paranoid chief of CIA counterintelligence and a Yale graduate, had no difficulty imagining Yalies as traitors. Though CIA director George Tenet's recent decision to lift the high-level security clearance of John Deutch, his predecessor (who took classified material home to use on his unsecured computer), was in some ways atypical of the agency—senior officers haven't usually been much punished for their sins—it does show that a sense of fairness can topple anyone.

The American penchant for the bureaucratization of secrecy also reinforces this leveling effect. In contrast to the men and women they are charged with vetting, the vast majority of the thousands of officials in the national security establishment involved in investigating and assessing security clearances are not exactly the best and the brightest in their respective organizations. Often, they have spent little or no time abroad, with the result that they have little or no appreciation for the inevitable foreign entanglements, romantic or otherwise, that a normal person working in foreign lands might get into—manifestations not of a penchant for treason but of a temperament well-suited to living outside the United States. Thus, as is common knowledge in the clandestine service, expats spotted overseas as good candidates for a CIA career have had a devilishly difficult time passing the background check. Meanwhile, an American born and bred in Ohio with no proven ability to thrive in, say, Egypt or Japan has a far better chance of getting through the agency's door.

When I joined the agency in 1985, however, the biggest obstacles to employment in sensitive government posts were sex and drugs. Mercifully, Langley's concern with libidos wasn't open-ended. Unlike the scrutiny today's presidential candidates face, our background check did not require us to enumerate all of our lovers, past and present (though foreign paramours were a different matter). No one questioned us about adultery (though we were asked to recount whether we'd ever lied, which of course might touch upon relations between men and women). And Langley was explicitly concerned only about "deviancy," which usually translated as being gay or having "homosexual inclinations." (Until recently, homosexuality was an unconditional firing offense at the CIA, as at the Pentagon—though not at the State Department.) Still, there was a broad consensus among CIA officers—not just curious security types—that sex shouldn't be entirely off-limits. Polygraphers liked to tell stories of CIA applicants confessing to onanism and bestiality.

We all agreed that sex with animals, at least, went too far for someone aspiring to a career in espionage and covert action. We didn't agree about homosexuality. Counterintelligence liked to argue that gays could be blackmailed. (Until the Clinton administration put a stop to it, the State Department used to try to counter this possibility by deploying "the flying gay squad," the nickname for a detachment from diplomatic security designed to force closeted foreign-service officers to reveal their homosexuality to at least one member of their immediate family.) Counterintelligence officers also used to argue that gays were more narcissistic than heterosexuals, and narcissists, by definition, focus on themselves more than on their communities—a good first step toward treason. Since there have been a number of heterosexual traitors in American history, and as even those homosexual

Reuel Marc Gerecht served in the clandestine service from 1985 to 1994. Under the pseudonym of Edward Shirley, he is the author of *Know Thine Enemy: A Spy's Journey Into Revolutionary Iran.*

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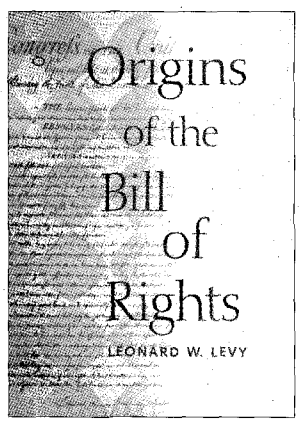

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traitors in England seemed far more motivated by ideology than by sexuality, these arguments seemed weak to many of us. A far stronger argument, it seems to me, would have been that in most cultures homosexuality is a tricky, if not illicit, affair. The clandestine service, which is in the business of trying to make foreigners feel comfortable, shouldn't intentionally seek to complicate an operation by using officers who may offend against local mores or violate local laws every time they have sex. Intelligence is inevitably a profession in which certain American principles are going to be suspended to obtain the desired results.

Curiously, I rarely heard this argument inside the organization, perhaps because by the mid-'80s feminism was gaining ground at Langley and fewer and fewer men were comfortable challenging the view that operations and assignments should be undifferentiated by gender. When James Woolsey took over the CIA in 1993, he let it be known that the agency's anti-homosexual security practices were unlikely to withstand court challenges. Applicants and officers today are no longer asked about sexual orientation.

More questions are being asked, however, about officers' sexual activities in the field. Intimacy with foreigners must always be reported in writing, or case officers could face serious disciplinary action. A married officer who wants to have an affair with a non-American is obviously in an awkward administrative position. Uncleared live-in girlfriends—formerly common among single male case officers—are now frowned upon. This seems like a mistake to me. Many old-school case officers who liked to brag about female conquests were no doubt awful husbands or, if unmarried, rogues, but so far no evidence has surfaced that their behavior ever led them close to treason.

Still, as grist for the security mill, for at least three decades drugs have been the biggest, and most dubious, disqualifier in background checks. Perhaps more than any other issue, drug use highlights the current confusion over the purposes of the background check. The most basic objective is to exclude from sensitive government positions individuals who either are, or are susceptible to becoming, agents of foreign or criminal influence. But background checks are also meant to ensure that officers have generally good characters. And in the discussion of drugs, and in the way security officials often handle the issue, the question of character, of faithfulness to the law, submerges the once-overriding issue of potentially treasonous behavior.

Before the Aldrich Ames spy scandal, the CIA was, I thought, trying to be progressive and selective on the drug issue. By 1985, marijuana was no longer a guaranteed killer of a CIA clearance. During the polygraph, the interviewer would always ask if you'd ever smoked pot and if you had stopped (which was essential to getting cleared). The use of drugs like LSD or heroin at any time, however, would finish you. Cocaine, too, it appeared, was a killer. (We'd heard from personnel types that the institution might make exceptions, but many of us thought that this was a friendly approach aimed at eliciting a disqualifying confession.)

However, it's not clear that the question is being handled as thoughtfully now as it was before the Ames debacle—the CIA went on security steroids after his arrest. With the Chinese spy scandal in the Energy Department and the emergence of Osama Bin Ladin, security and counterintelligence offices throughout the government have been flooded with money

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Sir Hugh Lloyd Jones (Oxford): "Goethe and the Greeks."
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4:30-5:30 p.m. Poetry Reading by **Charles Wright** from his work in progress.

Saturday, 30 October

9:00-11:00 noon. *Cervantes in a World Context.* Chair: **Dario Fernandez-Morera** (Northwestern).
Diana Wilson (University of Denver): "Cervantes and the Indies."
Howard Young (Pomona): "Conversations between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza."
James Parr (UC Riverside): "Don Quixote: Translation and Interpretation."

2:00-4:00 p.m. *The Humanities in the Undergraduate Curriculum.* Chair: **Mark Bauerlein** (Emory).
Kathy Eden (Columbia University): "The Great Books in the Undergraduate Curriculum."
John Briggs (UC Riverside): "Composition and the Humanities."
Thomas F. Bertonneau (ALSC): "Orality, Literacy, and the Humanities."

8:00 p.m. Banquet, followed by an address by **Sir Ferdinand Mount,** Editor in Chief, *Times Literary Supplement.*

Sunday, 31 October (Concurrent Sessions)

9:00-11:00 a.m. *Charles Wright, Poet and Three Critics.* Chair: **Eleanor Cook** (University of Toronto).
Bonnie Costello (Boston University): "The Passions of Charles Wright."
James Longenbach (University of Rochester): "The Landscapes of Charles Wright."
Willard Spiegelman (Southern Methodist University): "On Charles Wright."

Romantic Poetry. Chair: **Norman Fruman** (University of Minnesota).
Robert Gleckner (Duke): "Humpty Dumpty Blake."
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James Engell (Harvard): "Romantic Poems and Ideas."

Drama: Classic to Renaissance. Chair: **Mary Lefkowitz** (Wellesley).
Charles Marowitz (Malibu Stage Company): "Shakespearean Acting – Clue to Action."
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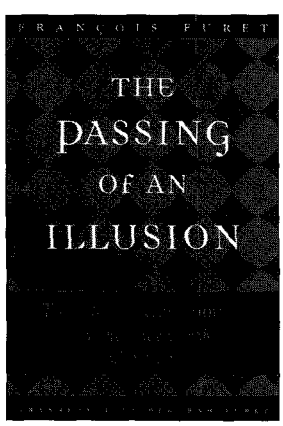

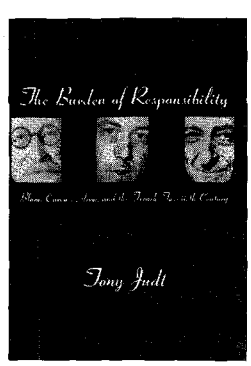

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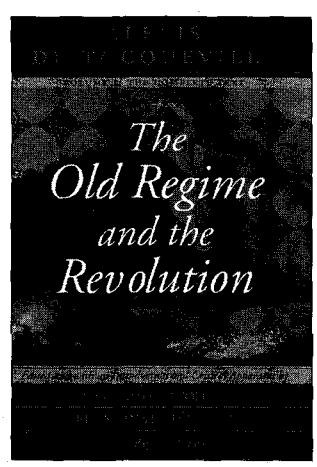

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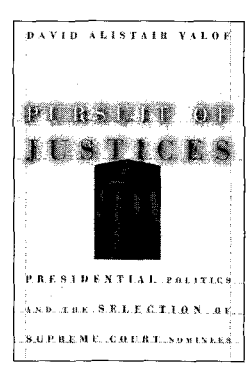

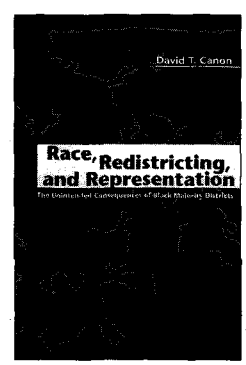

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and personnel. It would be natural for growing investigative agencies to expand the scope of their background checks. Thanks in large part to President Clinton's antics, morality has become a live wire in American society. And it is by no means clear yet how the Clinton years are going to affect the spirit and moral mechanics of Washington's bureaucracies.

George W. Bush and other politicians who have made errors in the past are lucky: they have the American people to judge them. Applicants to and employees of America's national security bureaucracies do not have such recourse. In the best of circumstances, background checks and security clearances are blunt instruments for assessing loyalty and patriotism. The more we inject "moral" issues into this process and the more we use background checks to detail good citizenship—evasion of the "nanny tax" is perhaps the silliest example—the more rigid our security procedures will become. We may stop tax cheats; it's very doubtful that we will stop potential enemy spies. If Bush can't pass a White House background check because of long-ago cocaine use, no White House staffer should hold it against him. Jailed drug users in Texas would, of course, be a different matter. ■

The case against virtual ballot boxes.

Voting Alone

By RICK VALELLY

IT'S NOT OFTEN that a special school district vote has the potential to alter the course of American politics. But last April, when residents of the Puget Sound city of Shelton, Washington, cast their votes on questions such as whether the Pioneer school district should have "full-day kindergarten every day of the school year," they made American electoral history. That's because, of the 560 votes cast on the special ballot, 103 were "e-votes." Using a system developed by VoteHere.net of Kirkland, Washington, 103 netizens used their home or workplace computers to vote over the Internet.

This was the first time that voters in the United States had cast ballots by using the Internet, and it almost certainly won't be the last. Indeed, as public officials continue to search for ways to remedy the problem of dwindling voter turnout—the percentage of the eligible population that votes in presidential elections has declined from 63 percent in 1960 to 49 percent in 1996—e-voting, with its twin attractions of convenience and technological glitz, looms ever larger on the horizon. California Secretary of State Bill Jones is considering implementing statewide e-voting, and similar proposals are being debated in Florida, Minnesota, and Washington. Nor is e-voting just an American phenomenon. The British Home Office recently recommended it as one of several possible responses to declining electoral participation in the United Kingdom.

Now is the time to stop and think before we make what could be a big mistake. Not only will e-voting fail to reverse electoral apathy, it will actually lead us in the wrong direction. Voting is more than the simple act of indicating one's political preference. It's a vital public ritual that increases social solidarity and binds citizens together. The history of voting in America clearly shows that the physical mechanics of voting have a huge impact on the quality of our public life.

WHILE THE INTRODUCTION of e-voting would certainly be significant, it would hardly be the first time Americans had experienced a dramatic change in the mechanics of how they vote. For most of the nineteenth century, voting was completely public. White men—and, for several decades after the Civil War, black men, too—would cast party-strip ballots, distinctive strips of paper printed by the parties they supported, in full view of everybody gathered at the courthouse. To be sure, the public party-strip-balloting method was susceptible to vote-buying and intimidation. But, at the same time, public voting made ordinary Americans into an extremely partisan—and, consequently, civically engaged—people. You had to be partisan, after all, to be comfortable broadcasting your political affiliation to everyone you knew. Not surprisingly, voter turnout in national elections was phenomenally high—as high as 82 percent—during this period.

Progressives, however, focused on the negatives of public voting, and, in 1888, Massachusetts became the first state to adopt the secret ballot. From there, this method spread quickly to the rest of the country. While the secret ballot brought order to the process of voting, it also made voting much less of a collective enterprise, turning it into a solitary rite. The vote became so sanctified, in fact, that voter registration was introduced in the 1890s and was firmly in place across the country by the 1930s—the rationale being that if you couldn't take the time to register, you hardly deserved the privilege of voting.

Eventually, of course, it became clear that this new way of voting was subtly—and, in some places, not so subtly—exclusionary. In particular, the personal registration requirement could be, and often was, transformed into a potent weapon against minorities, the poorly educated, and the poor. But the 1965 Voting Rights Act—and its amendments and renewals in 1970, 1975, and 1982—brought the federal government's authority and resources to bear on such abuses by states and localities, and many of the problems have been remedied. Southern and Southwestern politics, for instance, have become far more inclusive, and reforms such as the bilingual secret ballot have been introduced. Finally, with the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, also known as the motor voter law, Congress sharply increased the number of locations where voter registration could take place.

Today, though, as voter turnout continues to decline, the primary concern about voting is not fraud or exclusion but convenience. Public officials seem to believe that the best

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way to boost voter turnout is to make voting easier to fit into everyone's busy schedule. And the way to do that is to devise methods that allow for "remote voting"—in other words, letting people vote from the comfort of their homes or offices instead of having to travel to out-of-the-way polling stations.

While the most common form of remote voting, the absentee ballot, has long been available to people who, for unavoidable reasons, cannot make it to their local polling place on election day, the newer methods of remote voting are designed for everyone. Last year, voters in Oregon overwhelmingly approved a ballot initiative creating statewide vote-by-mail elections—the idea being, as Oregon's Secretary of State Phil Keisling explained to *The Washington Post*, that the "polling place as a mechanism is an unnecessary obstacle for people exercising their franchise." Now e-voting is being actively considered for similar reasons. As Steve Grossman, former chair of the Democratic National Committee and a big e-voting booster, recently told *The Hill*, "If we are going to make voting truly universal and accessible then Internet voting is going to be a key ingredient in achieving that goal."

Opponents of e-voting generally raise two objections. One hinges on the issue of access: since access to computers and the Internet is already stratified by race and class, won't e-voting be similarly stratified? The answer is that it probably won't. Most plans to institute e-voting will take unequal Internet access into account and will therefore make provisions for e-voting at community centers and public libraries. (Of course, if people can't e-vote from their homes or offices, then they'd probably be just as happy voting at a regular, old-fashioned polling place.)

The second objection has to do with fraud, which is a big concern about any transaction conducted over the Internet. But it appears that the technology exists to make e-voting secure. VoteHere.net—the firm that helped with the Shelton school district vote—has developed a system using encryption and decryption routines that make e-voting as fraudproof as the ballot box, if not more so.

So, if everybody will be able to e-vote, and if e-voting is essentially fraudproof, what could be wrong with it? The problem is that e-voting will transform voting, an inherently public activity, into a private one. Even with the secret ballot, the mechanics of voting are still explicitly designed to remind us that, in principle, we are all equal members of a political community. On Election Day, we must leave our homes and offices, travel to a polling place, and physically mingle with people who are plainly our equals that day, no matter what other differences we have. Voting, as we currently do it, is a civic ritual, however brief it may be.

This ritual is valuable not just because it makes us feel good about ourselves. It also gets us to think about public issues differently than we would otherwise. While it's generally assumed that people vote on the basis of their pocketbooks, surveys show that most people actually focus on things such as the national good, not their narrow self-interests, when they vote. One possible reason for this: when people are obliged to leave their homes and enter the public sphere, as they do when they vote, they tend to be more public-minded.

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E-voting, then, might aptly be called "voting alone." If our era is a time of citizen disengagement, of staring at screens and passing in and out of our gated communities or apartment fortresses as we wave to private security personnel, then e-voting from home is all too congruent with the spirit of the age. Far from enriching democracy, e-voting pushes us toward political anomie.

If we want to make voting more convenient and still preserve its uniquely public character, there are much better ways to accomplish this. One sensible reform would be to schedule elections on weekends instead of on Tuesdays. Another would be to abolish registration, as North Dakota has done, or to institute same-day registration, as Minnesota has.

But, in the meantime, suggestions of widespread e-voting should be treated as a Trojan horse. For more than 200 years, democratic citizens have gone outside on Election Day into a public sphere that for ten or twelve hours is abuzz with movement and talk. They have looked at their political equals with their own eyes. Do we want to trade all that in for a hollow "virtual" public sphere? Indeed, isn't the very concept of a virtual public sphere a contradiction in terms? ■

Brazil Dispatch

Heading South

By DAVID S. LANDES

THIS ARTICLE IS based on reading, conversation, and a one-week stay in Brazil. As everyone knows, one understands a foreign country better after one week than after a month or a year. Time brings shadings and doubts, but a quick visit has the force of revelation.

The law of temperature and economics that seems to hold true over so much of the globe also appears to be valid in Brazil: the cooler the climate of a particular region of a country, the more economically developed it is likely to be. But in Brazil, since the country is situated largely below the equator, the cooler climes lie toward the south, and thus everything is reversed in comparison with the countries of the Northern Hemisphere. Brazil, in other words, developed southward.

One can follow the sequence in terms of the succession of urban centers. In the very beginning, the heart of settlement was in the northeast portion of the country, with its ports of Natal, Pernambuco (Recife), and Salvador (Bahia). The European men who arrived in this region were fortune-hunters and differed radically from the families that settled New England and the Middle Atlantic colonies of North America. Even after the inauguration of crop agriculture, the holdings of settlers in Brazil took the form of plantations based on unfree labor: native Indians at first, then African slaves. Brazil didn't abolish slavery until 1888; only Cuba retained slavery as long. This reliance on slave labor encouraged a culture of indolence—the indolence of slaves, who may be forgiven their lack of energy and enthusiasm, and the indolence of masters and other freemen who came to look upon labor as unworthy and even degrading.

During the nineteenth century, Rio de Janeiro, some 1,000 miles farther south, sprang to the fore, becoming the administrative center of the Brazilian monarchy after its separation from Portugal. Rio remained the capital until the construction of Brasilia during the second half of the twentieth century. Even now, Rio—with its incomparable sea and beaches, bays, lagoons, and inlets, hills and abrupt peaks, forest and jungle—continues to possess an almost hypnotic attraction. Many of the bureaucrats and functionaries still maintain their residences and families in Rio, typically flying out to Brasilia at government expense to perform their duties. It's hard to fault the bureaucrats. Brasilia, after all, is artificial, spiritually and culturally void, whereas Rio has everything that makes life worth living. Thus, the city has continued to grow, and today its population is nearly seven million.

In response to criticism of their relaxed, easygoing ways, Rio natives, like the people of the northeast before them, have cultivated an ethic of virtuous pleasure. They don't want to be like those Protestant *norteamericanos*—dour, overworked, and incapable of enjoying life—and they have a point. Who says life would be better if they worked more? It might be materially richer. But spiritually?

Still, the citizens of São Paulo, farther south and west, have a different view. Here lies land suited to coffee, which has become Brazil's great agricultural export, and it was here that most of the immigrants of the late nineteenth century settled—Germans, Italians, Jews, Arabs. Today, half of the nation's manufacturing is located near São Paulo, along with many of its largest companies. In short, if Rio is where you go to spend your wealth, São Paulo is where you go to earn it. And, by the 1950s, the city's population had surpassed even Rio's. It is slated to reach 17.7 million in time for the new millennium, which would make São Paulo among the largest conurbations in the world.

The topography of São Paolo reflects the confusion and the opportunities of high-speed growth: office and apartment towers are everywhere, cheek by jowl with older, often decrepit structures. The city's major highway is a five-lane, slow-moving, half-choked river of cars. Rio is also clogged with traffic during rush hour, but in São Paulo rush hour starts early and lasts well into the evening. The transaction costs of transportation are so high that a number of enterprises are now leaving São Paulo for places still farther south.

OF COURSE, EVEN in São Paulo there is widespread poverty. In general, rich and poor live close to one another in both Rio and São Paulo, but in São Paulo the poor are more dispersed among their more fortunate countrymen. In Rio, the poor tend to live apart in slums called *favelas*, often built on upland slopes, while the rich hold the flatlands.

The visual contrast between rich and poor throughout Brazil reflects the nation's economic and social experience.

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The country grew economically at a 4.8 percent rate from 1900 to 1987. This represented the second-highest annual average in the world. Yet so poor was Brazil to begin with that it has not yet made it out of the middle rank: GNP per capita was $4,720 in 1997, compared with $37,850 for Japan.

Moreover, averages tell only a small part of the story. In 1995, the top 20 percent of Brazilians received 64.2 percent of all income; the top ten percent got 47.9 percent. The bottom 40 percent received only 8.2 percent. Meanwhile, the regional disparities that are so evident in the character of Brazil's major cities show up in the national statistics, as well. The lowest income, life expectancy, and literacy rates are found in the northeast, the old center of sugar and slavery. The highest rates are found in the south, the new center of industry.

THE RESENTMENT ENGENDERED by the dramatic disparities between Brazil's rich and poor frequently erupts in crime and violence and has created a climate of fear among the well-to-do. In Rio, the bourgeois go to the beach wearing nothing but a swimsuit and beach shoes. This is not due to lack of modesty but to the fact that one simply cannot leave anything on the sand. Put it down and it's gone. Anyone in Rio with any kind of money lives in a secure apartment building that is usually fenced as well as locked and guarded both outside and in. Private houses actually sell for less than apartments because apartments are safer. The waiting list to have cars armored stretches for months, despite the $40,000 cost. Cars have been ambushed or attacked when stopped at traffic lights. And, at least in Rio, thieves usually want only money and jewels. The situation is worse in São Paulo, where in at least one case a thief had no time to allow a woman to take off her rings and resorted to more violent means of extracting the wealth.

The police are powerless against or indifferent to this threat, and their frustration finds expression in their own violence. Among the easiest victims are street children, whom police will rough up and even kill by way of showing they are doing their job. Children are also killed by criminals and even by other children, sometimes in grisly ways. In 1991, the Institute of Legal Medicine in the state of Pernambuco autopsied the remains of 79 youngsters, ages ten to 17, who had been shot to death on the streets of Recife: about 80 percent of the bodies had been mutilated.

Given this state of latent civil war, what are Brazil's chances of promotion to modernity and wealth—for the poor as well as for the rich? Certainly, the nation's public education system will need to be reformed. At present, it is effectively segregated, with whites attending private schools and blacks forced to attend public schools with short hours, large classes, and low expectations. The schools, in effect, reflect and help perpetuate the polarization of society. Moreover, the tenacious refusal to recognize the presence of racism acts to discourage remedial measures: in theory, Brazil doesn't need them.

The country is currently scrambling to head off yet another crisis revolving around its foreign debt and the strength of its currency. Perhaps, with the aid and tutelage of the International Monetary Fund, it will succeed; perhaps not. But, in a deeper sense, the economic future of Brazil hinges on a change in cultural values. This is comparable to the formation of a factory labor force in the Europe of the industrial revolution, with the attendant transformation of peasants and farm laborers into proletarians. In Brazil, the transition could be more painful. To give up the boredom of the farm for the action and excitement of an industrial center, even if it meant crowding into urban slum housing, was one thing. To give up Carnaval, late dinners, swimming, playing, soccer madness—that's something else again.

Brazil will become richer. All the natural resources and explosive psychic energy have to pay off some day. Will it catch up with the advanced industrial nations? Maybe the south will—if it secedes. ■

Serbia Dispatch

Unopposed

By MASHA GESSEN

BELGRADE

HOW DOES A president who has lost four wars and drained the life out of his country's economy—who is hated by his own citizens, despised by his own army, and condemned by the world's most powerful nations—hold on to power? Easily, as long as the opposition is hopelessly fractured, the political system is stacked in his favor, and the exhausted population is ultimately too scared of losing what remnants of stability remain. With all those conditions firmly in place, so is Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

On August 21, the anti-Milosevic weekly *Vreme* came out with a banner headline that screamed "*Mrak*," which means "darkness"—in other words, that's what lies ahead for the country. Why wasn't the paper's outlook more optimistic just two days after Serbia's largest opposition rally in more than two years? You had to be at that rally to understand why it was, in fact, a depressing indicator of the state of the country's politics. More than 100,000 people stood impassively while the rally organizers screamed into the mike, trying to rouse the troops. That was the high point. The low point came when Vuk Draskovic, head of the Serbian Renewal Movement and a former member of Milosevic's government, appeared. Draskovic had said he would not take part in the rally, but he showed up and seized the stage—and was booed.

Draskovic, though in theory a member of the opposition, is arguably the Milosevic regime's greatest asset. Observing a nonaggression pact that dates back to 1996, other opposition activists refrain from attacking Draskovic on the record, but they privately accuse him of being in cahoots with the hated president. For his part, Draskovic says publicly that Milosevic must go—but only by means of early elections. In contrast, most other opposition leaders demand Milosevic's resignation. In Belgrade's political circles, people say that Milosevic will call elections for Novem-

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ber or December of this year—and that he will win.

Serbia's electoral map—29 oddly shaped districts—benefits Milosevic's Socialist Party. The district structure can only be changed by the parliament, which has no interest in doing so. In addition, opposition parties, ill-prepared to conduct a full-fledged election campaign so soon, may attempt to prevent the elections by boycotting them, as Zoran Djindjic's Democratic Party has done in the past. Opposition leaders are already laying the groundwork for such a boycott by setting out conditions that must be met before elections can be held. But Draskovic is almost certain to break ranks with the opposition and take part in the elections, thereby lending them legitimacy. Other parties that will participate include Vojislav Seselj's Radicals and Milosevic's wife's Yugoslav Left, both of which govern in coalition with Milosevic. So, the only possible change the elections could bring would be the addition to parliament of Draskovic's party, which has shown it can be a loyal partner to Milosevic. Since the president of Yugoslavia is elected by the federal parliament, Milosevic will not need to worry about facing the people directly.

Another reason for both the regime and Draskovic to favor holding elections soon is the media situation. Since the lifting of martial law after NATO's bombing campaign, the independent print media has resumed its normal editorial operations, but readership, by all accounts, is at an all-time low—readers are broke. The independent radio station B-92 has also come back, on a new frequency and under a new name (B2-92). But its status is precarious: the frequency is provided by the radio and TV network Studio B, which has promised not to interfere in editorial decisions but is controlled by Draskovic. In the wake of the NATO bombing, Milosevic's state-run TV network has seen its audience dwindle to a few hundred thousand people, but construction work on new transmitters is going ahead full steam. If necessary, Milosevic can also buy time on local stations—an option his opponents cannot afford. Even if the opposition politicians could get enough money, the portion of the media that Milosevic controls—which is already beginning a smear campaign against the opposition—would immediately question the origins of that money.

DRASKOVIC'S OLD PARTNERS from the opposition heyday of 1996–1997, Djindjic and Civic Alliance of Serbia founder Vesna Pesic, have had their reputations damaged by their perceived affiliation with the West and, perhaps even more importantly, their absence from the country during NATO's bombing. Djindjic, fearing a Milosevic crackdown on the opposition, fled to Montenegro; Pesic spent about a month in the United States. In the popular imagination, all of the existing opposition leaders—with the possible exception of the resolutely uncharismatic leader of the Democratic Party of Serbia, Vojislav Kostunica—are hopelessly marred by their association with the West. That, combined with Draskovic's, Pesic's, and Djindjic's failure to effect change during their many years in the political arena and what many remember as their betrayal of the people who took part in massive protests in 1996 and 1997 (they agreed to settle the crisis by compromising with Milosevic), prompts most analysts to yearn for new faces.

Pesic's Civic Alliance tried to address this demand by electing a new party president on August 1. But the move went largely unnoticed even by the party's supporters. Another possible answer is the new movement founded this month by retired General Momcilo Perisic. The general may be just the politician for the new Serbia: affiliated with the army and therefore presumed patriotic (despite, or because of, his own role in the war in Bosnia), once fired by Milosevic and therefore presumed to be in the opposition, but otherwise gloriously free of any sort of ideology. In a country fed up with politics and politicking, this might do the trick. Or it might not. "It's rather naïve to believe that former generals who have no halos around their heads can succeed now," says Mile Beljajac, a military historian and independent political analyst in Belgrade. "Only generals who earned such halos in times of war can unite people in times of difficulty." Despite having fought four wars in eight years, Serbia lacks any such heroes.

ASKED JUST HOW they envision overthrowing Milosevic, Perisic and his people are vague. "The general stands for the constitutional way, for the legal way," says Dusan Batakovic, an important behind-the-scenes player in Serbian politics who acts as a political adviser to the Serbian Orthodox Church and, now, to Perisic. Like other political analysts, he acknowledges that army officers, despite being furious with Milosevic for capitulating in a war they felt they were winning, are too obedient to stage a coup. So, like Pesic and Djindjic, Perisic talks of organizing a general strike that would force Milosevic to step down.

There are, however, two problems with that scenario. First, the citizens of Serbia do not seem likely to take part in a general strike. Their only experience of participating in mass protests has left them bitter: after marching for three cold months in winter 1996–1997, they saw Djindjic and Draskovic busy themselves dividing what little power Milosevic had deigned to cede them. Second, they are terrified of losing what little they still have after all the sanctions and all the wars. True, many people are out of work, and many others have not been paid in four or five months, but, says sociologist Mihailo Markovic, a former high-level Socialist Party functionary and Milosevic ally who has been on the outs with the president since 1995, "they still have the impression that they are in the system, just, temporarily, without much work. This is where the opposition makes a great big blunder, because they talk openly about splitting up big enterprises, making the labor force more efficient—and people, of course, translate that into a picture of a bleak future for themselves."

But suppose the opposition does manage to pull together and organize a general strike. There is still one final, intractable obstacle: Milosevic, who has consistently demonstrated his total disregard for his country's economic problems, its shrinking territory, and its dwindling population, won't step down just because his country has come to a standstill. This is not a man who responds to conventional political cost-benefit analysis. As one Belgrade opposition journalist puts it, "If we try to analyze Slobo as if he were a sane person, it will not work." ■

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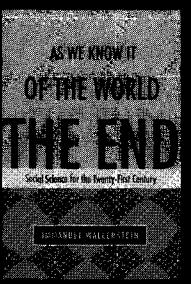

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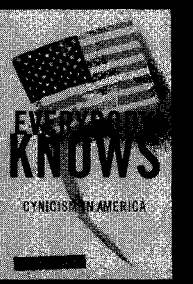

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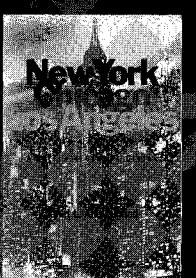

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Kosovo Dispatch

Patchwork Protectorate

By David Rieff

PRISTINA

After each post-cold-war disaster, from Rwanda to Bosnia, the capital of the afflicted country has filled up with white four-wheel-drive vehicles—Land Rovers, Nissan Patrols, Toyota Land Cruisers. Kosovo is no exception. Driving to this battered city, the province's capital, it is hard to escape a generic sense of being in "humanitarian emergency land." The streets and the makeshift parking lots are crammed with cars belonging to the International Rescue Committee, Médecins Sans Frontières, Oxfam, and the rest. There is even a section of Pristina where the houses have mostly been taken over by the relief groups: "Sunny Hill," they call it.

Of course, other vehicles with more serious paint jobs are here, too. These are the armored personnel carriers and Humvees of KFOR, the NATO-run force that provides what security there is in Kosovo. And, on the city's streets, heavily armed British troops thread through crowds of young Albanians for whom the period since the withdrawal of the Serb forces and paramilitaries has been a kind of revel mixed with sporadic acts of revenge.

These days, the Serbs are on the receiving end here. That might be thought of as poetic justice were it not for the fact that the Serbs who have remained are not those guilty of crimes against the Kosovars—those folks fled with the Yugoslav troops—but mostly elderly people with no place to go. They barely venture outside, knowing that they will face harassment if they try even to go shopping, let alone try to get treatment at the hospital.

For all the firm words of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, universally known by its acronym, UNMIK, there is little that either the U.N. or KFOR can do about this. Kosovo is a de facto U.N.-NATO protectorate, but this does not mean that the French politician and humanitarian activist who heads UNMIK, Bernard Kouchner, has the power to mollify the Kosovars after what they suffered at the hands of the Serbs. The U.N.'s legal mandate, based on Security Council Resolution 1244, calls for the building of a democratic and multiethnic Kosovo. This is a sop to Western consciences, not a viable program. The wounds are just too deep.

The situation in Kosovo prompts analogies to what went on half a century ago in Czechoslovakia, with the Serbs playing the role of the Sudeten Germans. And, as with the Sudeten Germans, what is being done to the Serbs is awful and unjust but also inevitable—proof, as if proof were needed, of W.H. Auden's maxim that "those to whom evil is done do evil in return."

This doesn't mean the Serb leaders who remain are repentant; quite the contrary. At UNMIK headquarters, which was Yugoslav army headquarters before KFOR took over, officials talk hopefully of the Serb leadership, particularly of Bishop Artemije, the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo. They point out that he has denounced the war and called for Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's ouster, and they imply that he represents the so-called other Serbia, the one the West keeps construing as a liberal alternative to Milosevic's sanguinary nationalism.

A visit to Artemije's headquarters, a fourteenth-century monastery in the town of Gracanica, soon dispels these fantasies. Gracanica is a Serb enclave preserved by British squaddies, who patrol the town and camp on the monastery grounds. Serb nationalism remains in full flower. The café across the street from the monastery's main gate is named "1389." Such commemorations of the Battle of Kosovo, the defining historical event for every Serb nationalist, hardly end there. In Artemije's reception hall, icons of Jesus and Mary hang beside tapestries embroidered with the mythic date and printed with scenes from the battle.

As Artemije began to speak about the sufferings of the Serb people and the failure of KFOR to protect them, a shy nun passed around glasses of slivovitz. The glasses, too, were decorated with lettering commemorating the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. In other words, they were produced as part of the very 1989 celebrations in which Milosevic made his famous speech at the Kosovo battle monument announcing his Greater Serbia project.

As Artemije spoke, it became clear that his objections to Milosevic and to what had happened in Kosovo had as much, if not more, to do with the fact that the atheist Milosevic had started a war the Serbs were doomed to lose than with any principled objection to what had been done to the Kosovars. He nodded approvingly as a local Serb politician summoned for the interview (I was there as part of a delegation from the International Rescue Committee) insisted that "Serbs are now suffering much more than Albanians ever suffered." He seemed to beam as the man asked why President Clinton, a Christian, "helps this Muslim jihad." Finally, Artemije himself intervened. "The Serb people in Kosovo and Metohija," he intoned, "are facing their crucifixion. I hope that, as Christians, you will attend this crucifixion." Then he added, as if to forestall any question of what the Kosovars had suffered, "There are not two Gods, just one: Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ." In the garden below, British soldiers were looking up at the solar eclipse through protective glasses. Though Artemije more than once quoted the biblical injunction that "the truth will set you free," in fact he was no more capable of seeing the truth of what had happened to the Kosovars than the squaddies were of watching the eclipse with their naked eyes.

It was easy to feel sorry for Artemije and his monks and nuns. Without their ring of British soldiers, they would not last a day. And yet, even if KFOR's efforts to get them to

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remain are successful, it is clear that Kosovo is well on its way to becoming almost exclusively an ethnic Albanian region. Foreign diplomats are virtually unanimous in believing that the campaign to expel the Serbs has been concerted. The Serbs continue, notably, to hold onto a few enclaves and, with the apparent connivance of French KFOR troops, the area around the northern town of Mitrovica and its surrounding villages, which include the mines and factories of the industrial complex known during Yugoslav times as the Trepce Kombinat.

But, for the most part, much to the consternation of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Serbs are leaving, never to return. Dennis McNamara, the head of UNHCR in Kosovo, insists that this was preventable. Others on his staff have said privately that, had the U.S. government made it clear to the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) that the issue of the Serbs remaining was of paramount importance, the pressures on the Serbs would have abated. And they may have been right, at least in the beginning, since there is no question that some U.S. officials, notably Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's key aide, James Rubin, wield considerable influence over KLA leaders such as Hashim Thaci.

But, by now, it is almost certainly too late. Relations between UNMIK and KFOR and the Kosovar Albanians are deteriorating fast. Even the habitually upbeat Jock Covey, the American diplomat who is Kouchner's deputy, concedes that "we are in a race against time trying to get effective institutions in place before we run out of goodwill."

COVEY HAS GOOD intentions. But, like so many U.N.-run initiatives, UNMIK is trapped in its own contradictions. It is, for all intents and purposes, a colonial administration; yet it does not want this role, and its officials talk incessantly of devolving power to the Kosovars themselves. But, in order to be able to believe, as they clearly do, that this is possible on anything but the local level or with regard to mundane activities such as garbage collection or road maintenance, UNMIK has had to do more than spin visiting journalists. They have had to sell themselves on claims about Kosovo that bear little, if any, relation to the harsh realities of the place.

Covey told me that "we're getting down to Eastern European transition politics," as if Kosovo were the Czech Republic. He also spoke blandly of "restarting" Kosovo's economy, even though this has not even worked in Bosnia, which, unlike Kosovo, actually had an industrial base and a skilled industrial workforce. The fact that Kosovo is not an emerging democracy and that, economically, it was always a basket case that survived by dint of the black market, guest-worker remittances from abroad, and subsidies from the federal Yugoslav budget was passed over in silence.

In fact, the only worry Covey expressed was, predictably, about press criticism. "We need to keep the faith," he said. "As long as we're not crippled by attacks on the U.N., and the international community doesn't lose faith in us, we'll get the job done." He added, perhaps unwisely, "I'd be disappointed if we didn't have an effect within six months."

Of course, UNMIK could succeed, at least after a fashion. But that would require it to behave in the very ways that Covey and Kouchner have claimed it has no intention of behaving—as a colonial authority. Were UNMIK and KFOR to remain in Kosovo for a generation, it is possible that a very different kind of politics could be nurtured in Kosovo. And perhaps, for all the official demurrals, this is what will in fact occur. The problem is that the thirst of the Kosovars for nationhood, whether it involves only Kosovo itself or some version of the idea of Greater Albania, grows daily. And when the humanitarian emergency, which largely consists of the need to rebuild the 100,000 houses and other buildings the Serbs destroyed, is addressed, as it surely will be by a year from now, the conflict between UNMIK and at least some Kosovars will be hard to resolve.

The fact is that the international actors and the Kosovars have very different agendas. UNMIK wants to put off consideration of the final status of Kosovo for as long as possible. The Kosovars want independence, which to them means a Serb-free state of their own. But officials, such as Covey, hew to the West's plan. "I don't believe in an ethnically pure entity," he told me.

NONE OF US does. Alas, Covey sometimes confuses his likes and dislikes with political reality. His claim that Kosovo was "always a mosaic" suggests that here, too, he is daydreaming about Bosnia. There was never a tradition of ethnic comity in Kosovo. In any case, for all intents and purposes, Kosovo is already an ethnically pure entity. The real question is what kind of ethnically pure entity the various international organizations and outside powers can assist it in—or, indeed, prevent it from—becoming. Even this will require a level of sustained financial subsidy from the West that seems unlikely to materialize.

Along with money, UNMIK officials would have to figure out how to build (not rebuild) a Kosovo very different from any that has ever existed. International institutions are actually quite ill-suited to doing this, as the U.N.'s "nation-building" experiences in Cambodia and Somalia demonstrated. They are too bureaucratic, too riven by internal disagreements, and too beholden to outside pressures—above all from the national governments that control the flow of funds. An UNMIK made up of failed politicians like Kouchner and seconded officials like Covey is hardly likely to have the authority to act decisively, even if it had a coherent idea about what to do—which it clearly does not.

For all the attention and resources being lavished on Kosovo, most international officials deal with it according to their mandates or their hopes rather than its realities. Here is a place where, as McNamara observed, the system "is even more defunct than Cambodia was." Here is a political culture based on clan affiliations and memories of the most terrible suffering, a would-be microstate that has never known democracy and where the nonviolence preached by figures such as Ibrahim Rugova has been largely discredited. And here is UNMIK, prattling on about civil society and democratic transitions as if these were magic bullets that could slay the dragon of ethnic hatred or heal the wounds of war and deportation. If it were not so tragic, it would be comical. ■

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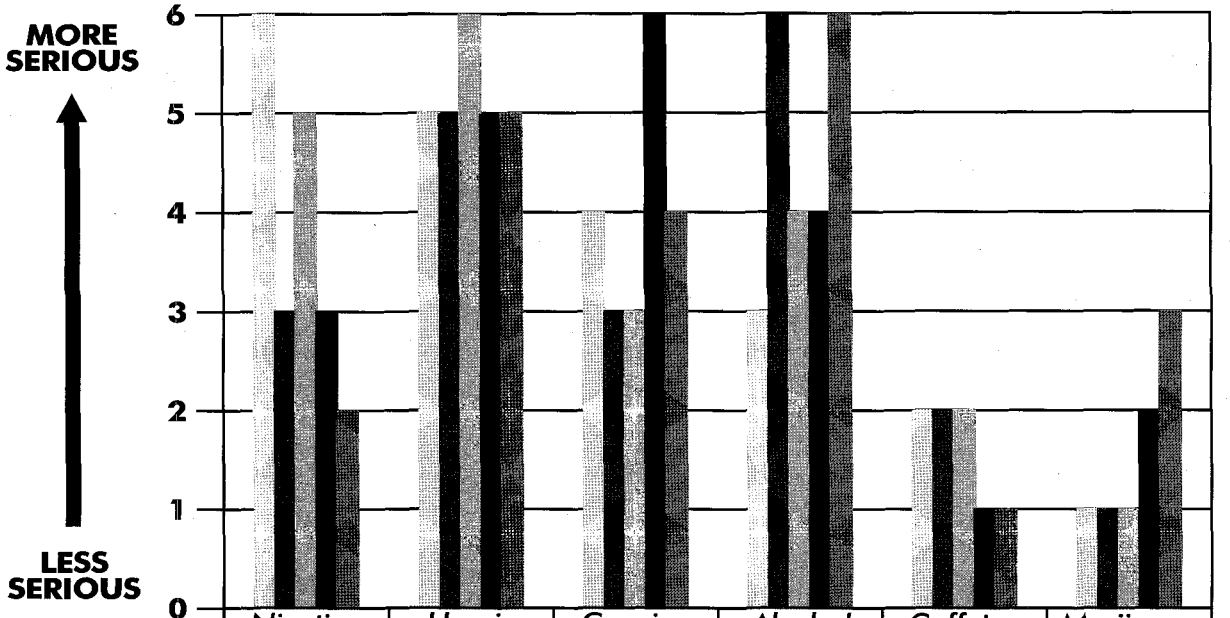
Do Our Drug Laws Focus on the Truly Dangerous Drugs?

Comparing Dangers of Popular Drugs

(Lower score indicates less serious effect)



	Nicotine	Heroin	Cocaine	Alcohol	Caffeine	Marijuana
DEPENDENCE	6	5	4	3	2	1
WITHDRAWAL	4	5	3	6	2	1
TOLERANCE	5	6	3	4	2	1
REINFORCEMENT	3	5	6	4	1	2
INTOXICATION	2	5	4	6	1	3

Source: Dr. Jack E. Henningfield, Ph.D. for NIDA. Reported by: Philip J. Hilts, *New York Times*, Aug. 2, 1994 *"Is Nicotine Addictive? It Depends on Whose Criteria You Use."*

Does Jailing Marijuana Users Make More Sense than Jailing Coffee Drinkers?

Common Sense for Drug Policy, Kevin B. Zeese, President
703-354-5694, 703-354-5695 (fax), info@csdp.org, www.csdp.org

Dependence: How difficult it is for the the user to quit, the relapse rate, the percentage of people who eventually become dependent, the rating users give their own need for the substance and the degree to which the substance will be used in the face of evidence that it causes harm.
Withdrawal: Presence and severity of characteristic withdrawal symptoms.
Tolerance: How much of the substance is needed to satisfy increasing cravings for it, and the level of stable need that is eventually reached.
Reinforcement: A measure of the substance's ability, in human and animal test, to get users to take it again and again, and in preference to other substances.
Intoxication: Though not usually counted as a measure of addiction in itself, the level of intoxication is associated with addiction and increases the personal and social damage a substance may do.

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Suspect

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING case study in the complex interaction of race and law enforcement. An officer from the Drug Enforcement Administration stops and questions a young man who has just stepped off a flight to Kansas City from Los Angeles. The officer has focused on this man for several reasons. Intelligence reports indicate that black gangs in Los Angeles are flooding the Kansas City area with illegal drugs, and the man in question was on a flight originating in Los Angeles. Young, toughly dressed, and appearing very nervous, he paid for his ticket in cash, checked no luggage, brought two carry-on bags, and made a beeline for a taxi upon deplaning. Oh, and one other thing: the officer also took into account the fact that the young man was black. When asked to explain himself, the officer declares that he considered the individual's race, along with other factors, because doing so helps him efficiently allocate the limited time and other resources at his disposal.

How should we evaluate the officer's conduct? Should we applaud it? Permit it? Prohibit it? As you think through this example, be aware that it is not a hypothetical one. Encounters like this take place every day, all over the country, as police attempt to battle street crime, drug trafficking, and illegal immigration. And this particular case study happens to be the fact pattern presented in a federal lawsuit of the early '90s, *United States* v. *Weaver*, in which the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit upheld the constitutionality of the officer's action.

"Large groups of our citizens," the court declared, "should not be regarded by law enforcement officers as presumptively criminal based upon their race." The court went on to say, however, that "facts are not to be ignored simply because they may be unpleasant." According to the court, the circumstances were such that it made sense for the officer to regard blackness, when considered in conjunction with the other factors, as a signal that could be legitimately relied upon in the decision to approach and ultimately detain the suspect. "We wish it were otherwise," the court maintained, "but we take the facts as they are presented to us, not as we would like them to be." Other courts have agreed with the Eighth Circuit that the Constitution does not prohibit police from routinely taking race into account when they decide whom to stop and question, as long as they do so for purposes of bona fide law enforcement (not racial harassment) and as long as race is one of several factors that they consider.

These judicial decisions have been welcome news to the many police officers and other law enforcement officials who consider the racial selectivity of the sort deployed by the DEA agent an essential weapon in the war on crime. Such defenders of what has come to be known as racial profiling maintain that, in areas where young African American males commit a disproportionate number of the street crimes, the cops are justified in scrutinizing that sector of the population more closely than others—just as they are generally justified in scrutinizing men more closely than women. As Bernard Parks, chief of the Los Angeles Police Department, explained to Jeffrey Goldberg of *The New York Times Magazine*: "We have an issue of violent crime against jewelry salespeople.... The predominant suspects are Colombians. We don't find Mexican-Americans, or blacks, or other immigrants. It's a collection of several hundred Colombians who commit this crime. If you see six in a car in front of the Jewelry Mart, and they're waiting and watching people with briefcases, should we play the percentages and follow them? It's common sense."

For cops like Parks, racial profiling is a sensible, statistically based tool that enables them to focus their energies efficiently for the purpose of providing protection against crime to law-abiding folk. To borrow a concept from economics, it lowers the cost of obtaining and processing information, which in turn lowers the overall cost of doing the business of policing.

Moreover, the very fact that a number of cops who support racial profiling are black, like Parks, buttresses their claims that the practice isn't motivated by bigotry. Indeed, these police officers note that racial profiling is race-neutral in that various forms of it can be applied to persons of all races, depending on the circumstances. In predominantly black neighborhoods and other places in which white people stick out in a suspiciously anomalous fashion (as potential drug customers or racist hooligans, for example), whiteness can become part of a profile. In the southwestern United States, where Latinos often traffic in illegal immigrants, apparent Latin American ancestry can become part of a profile. In a Chinatown where Chinese gangs appear to dominate certain criminal rackets, apparent Chinese ancestry can become

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Policy

Racial profiling usually isn't racist. It can help stop crime. And it should be abolished.

By RANDALL KENNEDY

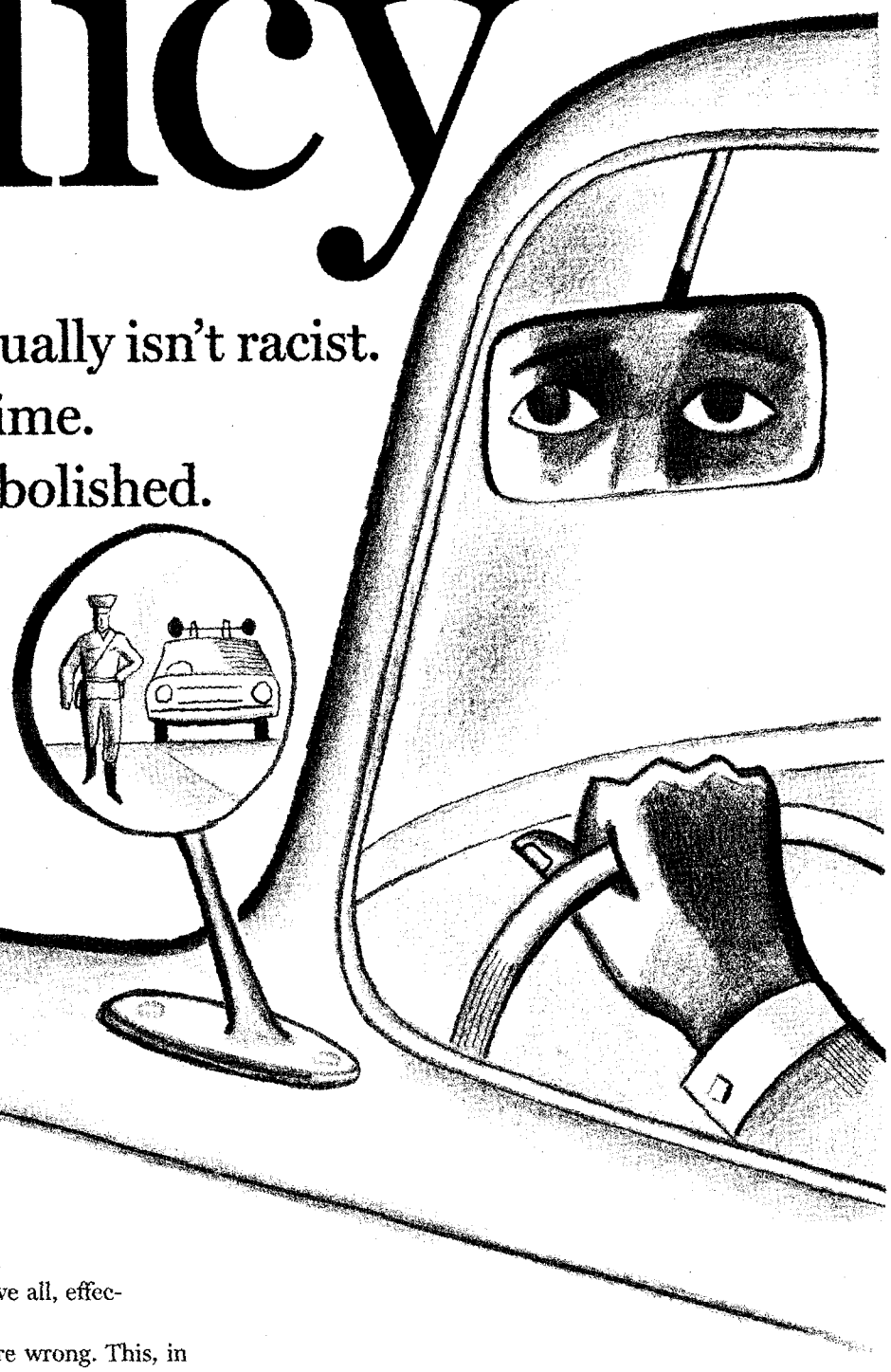

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID SUTER

part of a profile. Racial profiling, then, according to many cops, is good police work: a race-neutral, empirically based, and, above all, effective tool in fighting crime.

But the defenders of racial profiling are wrong. This, in itself, is not a particularly original claim. Indeed, ever since the Black and Latino Caucus of the New Jersey State Legislature held sensational hearings a few months ago, complete with testimony from victims of the New Jersey State Police force's allegedly overly aggressive racial profiling, the air has been thick with public denunciations of the practice. In June, at a forum organized by the Justice Department on racial problems in law enforcement, President Clinton condemned racial profiling as a "morally indefensible, deeply corrosive practice." Vice President Al Gore has promised that, if elected president, he would see to it that the first civil rights act of the new century would end racial profiling. His rival for the Democratic nomination, Bill Bradley, has countered that Gore should prepare an executive order and ask the president to sign it *now*.

Unfortunately, though, many who condemn racial profiling do so without really thinking the issue through. One common complaint about racial profiling is that using race (say, blackness) as one of several factors in selecting targets

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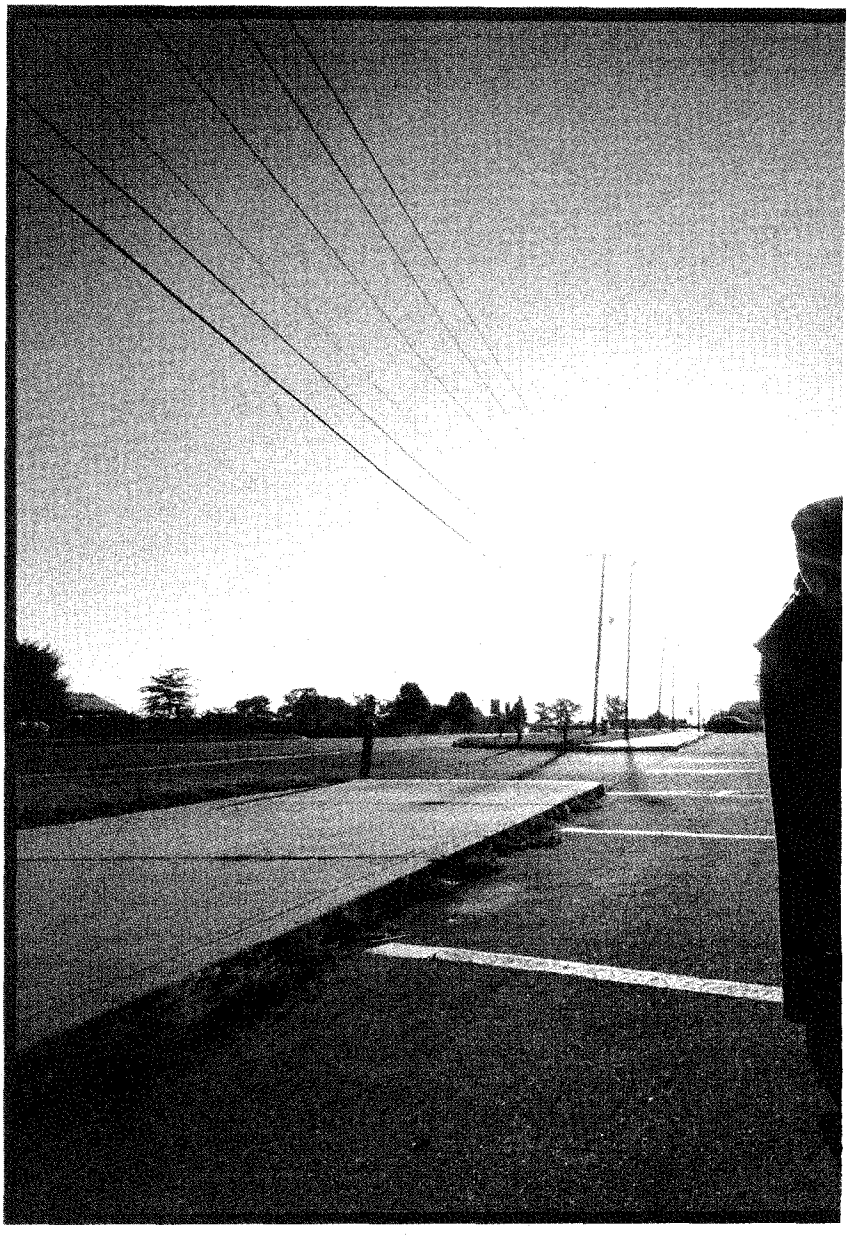
of surveillance is fundamentally and necessarily racist. But racial selectivity of this sort can be defended on nonracist grounds and is, in fact, embraced by people who are by no means anti-black bigots and are not even cops. Even Jesse Jackson once revealed himself to be an amateur racial profiler. "There is nothing more painful to me at this stage in my life," he said in 1993, "than to walk down the street and hear footsteps and start to think about robbery and then look around and see somebody white and feel relieved." The reason Jackson felt relief was not that he dislikes black people. He felt relief because he estimated, probably correctly, that he stood a somewhat greater risk of being robbed by a black person than by a white person.

A SECOND STANDARD criticism of racial profiling involves a blanket denial of the central empirical claim upon which the practice rests: that in certain jurisdictions individuals associated with particular racial groups commit a disproportionate number of the crimes. But there's no use pretending that blacks and whites commit crimes (or are victims of crime) in exact proportion to their respective shares of the population. Statistics abundantly confirm that African Americans—and particularly young black men—commit a dramatically disproportionate share of street crime in the United States. This is a sociological fact, not a figment of the media's (or the police's) racist imagination. In recent years, for example, victims of crime report blacks as the perpetrators in around 25 percent of the violent crimes suffered, although blacks constitute only about twelve percent of the nation's population.

So, if racial profiling isn't necessarily bigoted, and if the empirical claim upon which the practice rests is sound, why is it wrong?

The argument begins with an insistence upon the special significance of racial distinctions in American life and law. Racial distinctions are and should be different from other lines of social stratification. That is why, since the civil rights revolution of the 1960s, courts have typically ruled—pursuant to the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause—that mere reasonableness is an insufficient justification for officials to discriminate on racial grounds. In such cases, courts have generally insisted on applying "strict scrutiny"—the most intense level of judicial review—to the government's actions. Under this tough standard, the use of race in governmental decision-making may be upheld only if it serves a compelling government objective and only if it is "narrowly tailored" to advance that objective. Strict scrutiny embodies the recognition, forged in the difficult crucible of American history, that the presence of a racial factor in governmental decision-making gives rise to the presumption that officials may be acting in violation of someone's civil rights.

A disturbing feature of the debate over racial profiling is that many people, including judges, are suggesting that decisions distinguishing between persons on a racial basis do not constitute unlawful racial discrimination when race is not the sole consideration prompting disparate treatment. The court that upheld the DEA agent's detainment of the young black man at the Kansas City airport declined to describe the agent's action as racially discriminatory and thus evaded the requirement of subjecting the government's action to strict scrutiny. More recently, as Goldberg showed in his *New York Times Magazine* article, New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman has been willing to denounce as wrongful racial discrimination only racial profiling in which "race is the only factor." For Whitman, when race is just one of a number of factors, the profiling ceases to be "racial" and becomes instead a defensible technique in which a police officer merely uses



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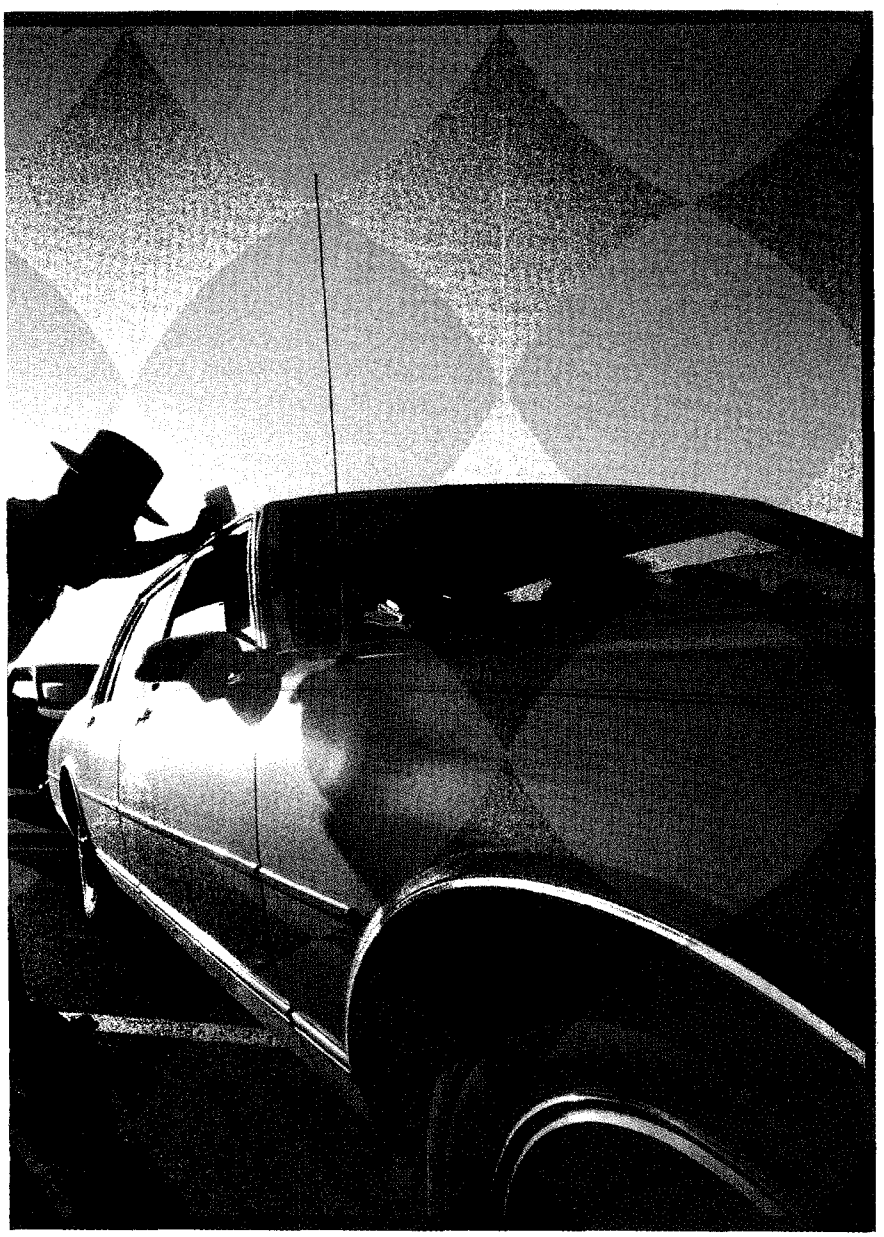
"cumulative knowledge and training to identify certain indicators of possible criminal activity." This dilution of the meaning of discrimination is troubling not only because it permits racial profiling to continue without adequate scrutiny. Even worse, this confusion will likely seep into other areas of racial controversy, causing mischief along the way.

Few racially discriminatory decisions are animated by only one motivation; they typically stem from mixed motives. For example, an employer who prefers white candidates to black candidates—except black candidates with clearly superior experience and test scores—is engaging in racial discrimination, even though race is not the only factor he considers (since he is willing to select black superstars). There are, of course, different degrees of discrimination. In some cases, race is a marginal factor; in others it is the only factor. The distinction may have a bearing on the moral or logical justification for the discrimination. But it cannot logically negate the *existence* of racial discrimination. Taking race into account at all means engaging in racial discrimination.



JAKE CHESSUM

Because racial discrimination is discouraged by both law and morality, proponents of racial profiling should bear the burden of persuading the public that such discrimination is justifiable. Instead, defenders of racial profiling frequently neglect the costs of the practice. They unduly minimize (or ignore altogether) the large extent to which racial profiling constantly adds to the sense of resentment felt by blacks of every social stratum toward the law enforcement establishment. Ironically, this is a cost of racial profiling that may well hamper law enforcement. In the immediate aftermath of O.J. Simpson's acquittal, when blacks' accumulated anger at and distrust of the criminal justice system became frighteningly clear, there existed a widespread recognition of the danger that threatens all Americans when cynicism and rage suffuse a substantial sector of the country. Alienation of that sort gives rise to witnesses who fail to cooperate with the police, citizens who view prosecutors as "the enemy," lawyers who disdain the rules they have sworn to uphold, and jurors who yearn to "get even" with a system that has, in their eyes, consistently mistreated them. For the sake of better law enforcement, we need to be mindful of the deep reservoir of anger toward the police that now exists within many racial minority neighborhoods. Racial profiling is a big part of what keeps this pool of accumulated rage filled to the brim.

YET THE COURTS have not been sufficiently mindful of this risk. In the course of rejecting a 1976 constitutional challenge to actions by officers of the U.S. Border Patrol who selected cars for inspection in Southern California partly on the basis of some drivers' apparent Mexican ancestry, the Supreme Court pointed to what it viewed as positive results. The Court noted that, of the motorists passing the checkpoint involved, fewer than one percent were stopped for questioning. It also noted that, of the 820 vehicles inspected pursuant to the profiling during the eight days surrounding the challenged arrests, roughly 20 percent contained illegal aliens.

As Justice William J. Brennan noted in dissent, however, the Court provided no indication of the ancestral makeup of all of the persons stopped in conformity with the Border Patrol profile. It is likely that a large percentage of the innocent people who were stopped and questioned were persons of apparent Mexican ancestry who found themselves in the position of having to prove their obedience to the law simply because others of their national

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origin have engaged in misconduct.

The burden placed on innocent people stopped by law enforcement officers because of racial profiling is typically underestimated. In the case of the Border Patrol, the Supreme Court maintained that the agents' intrusion on those selected for questioning is "quite limited," involving "only a brief detention of travelers during which all that is required ... is a response to a brief question or two and possibly the production of a document."

There is reason, however, to be skeptical of this upbeat portrait of quick and courteous police intervention. The justices seemed to forget that people who look Mexican and live in border regions are what game theorists call "repeat players." Their national origin, actual or apparent, remains the same long after the first time they get pulled over. Unlike Anglos, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans must contemplate not just the possibility of one or two stops in their lifetimes, but many.

MOREOVER, EVERYONE INVOLVED in such an encounter knows that race played a role in the officer's decision to stop the car, which sets up a downward spiral in relations between the Border Patrol and Latinos. Officers who start out doing their duty courteously will encounter people who resent having been stopped in part because of their racial or national heritage. The people stopped will vent their resentment. The officer will respond in kind, which will provoke the person in the car further. Next thing you know, there's a violent incident. And don't forget that the cops are repeat players in this game, too. How courteous—and how sincerely nonracist—can we expect them to be after a few months of such hassles?

My case against racial profiling concludes on a frankly ideological note. Racial profiling undercuts a good idea that needs more support from both society and the law: that individuals should be judged by public authority on the basis of their own conduct and not on the basis—not even *partly* on the basis—of racial generalization. Race-dependent policing retards the development and spread of such thinking; indeed, it encourages the opposite tendency.

What about the fact that in some jurisdictions it is demonstrable that people associated with a given racial group commit a disproportionately large number of the crimes? Our commitment to a just social order should prompt us to end racial profiling even if the generalizations on which the technique is based are buttressed by empirical evidence. This is not as unusual as it may sound. There are actually many contexts in which the law properly enjoins us to forswear the playing of racial odds even when doing so would advance certain legitimate goals.

For example, public opinion surveys have established that blacks tend to be more distrustful than whites of law enforcement. Thus, for purposes of convicting certain defendants, it would be rational—and not necessarily racist—for a prosecutor to use race as a factor in seeking to exclude black potential jurors. Fortunately, the Supreme Court has outlawed racial discrimination of this sort. Similarly, it is a demographic fact that whites tend to live longer than blacks. Therefore, it would be perfectly rational for insurers to charge blacks higher life-insurance premiums than whites. Fortunately, though, the law forbids that, too. And, given that, statistically, whites tend to be better educated than blacks, it might make business sense for an employer to give a racial edge to white applicants. But a battery of laws proscribes racial discrimination in the workplace, even under circumstances in which it would strengthen a business's bottom line.

The point here is that racial equality, like all good things in life, costs something; it does not come for free. Politicians often speak as if all that Americans need to do in order to attain racial justice is forswear bigotry. They must do that. But they must do more as well. They must be willing to demand equal treatment before the law even under circumstances in which unequal treatment is plausibly defensible in the name of nonracist goals. They must even be willing to do so when their effort will be costly.

Since abandoning racial profiling would undeniably raise the information costs of policing to some extent, with some attendant potential loss in effective crime control, those of us who would do away with it must advocate a responsible alternative. Mine is simply to spend more on other means of enforcement—and then spread the cost on some nonracial basis. This is hardly infeasible. One possibility is hiring more police officers. Another is subjecting everyone to closer surveillance. A benefit of the second option would be to acquaint more whites with the burden of police intrusion, the knowledge of which might prompt more whites to insist upon reining the police in. As it stands now, this burden falls with unfair severity upon minorities—imposing on Mexican- Americans, blacks, and others a special kind of tax for the war against illegal immigration, drugs, and other forms of criminality. The racial character of that tax should be repealed.

I AM NOT saying that police should never be able to refer to race. If a young white man with blue hair robs me, the police should certainly be able to use the description of the perpetrator's race in efforts to apprehend the felon. In this situation, though, whiteness is a trait linked to a particular person with respect to a particular incident. It is not a free-floating proxy for risk that hovers over young white men practically all the time—which is the predicament in which young black men currently find themselves. Nor am I saying absolutely that race could never be legitimately relied upon as a signal of increased danger. In an extraordinary circumstance in which plausible alternatives appear to be absent, officials might appropriately feel bound to resort to racial profiling. This would be right, however, only in a rare instance in which a strong presumption against racial profiling has been overcome by evidence of compelling circumstances. This is a far cry from the situation today, in which racial profiling is routine and is subjected to far less scrutiny than it warrants.

Now that racial profiling is a hot issue, the prospects for policy change have improved. In June, President Clinton directed federal law enforcement agencies to collect and report information aimed at determining the extent to

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which their officers in the field stop or search individuals on the basis of race. The Customs Service has indicated that it is rethinking its practice of using apparent ethnicity or nationality as a basis for selecting certain subjects to investigate more closely than others. The Federal Aviation Administration has been reevaluating the security procedures it recommends for the nation's airlines; it wants the airlines to combat terrorism with computer profiling, a system that is purportedly less race-based than checks by airport personnel.

Unfortunately, though, a minefield of complexity occupies the terrain beneath many of these actions—which, after all, have been spurred by politicians' simplistic rhetoric. Unless these complexities are understood, this fleeting opportunity to address racial profiling properly will be wasted. Take the basic issue of defining racial profiling. As we have seen, many police officials, politicians, and community activists say that racial profiling occurs when a police officer stops, questions, or arrests someone *solely* on the basis of his or her skin color. They propose that definition for different reasons. Community activists like it because it helps them fire up the emotions of their followers by evoking a scene that is unequivocally evil: the crudely bigoted officer, to gratify his or her racist itch, harassing and humiliating black men for no legitimate purpose. Police officials and politicians like this definition, too, because it enables them to condemn resoundingly something that is already thoroughly discredited.

To fulminate against police officers who engage in such practices, however, requires no real confrontation with the status quo, because hardly anyone of substance or standing defends police surveillance triggered *solely* by race. The legal system stands ready to punish the officer who uses race alone as a signal of suspicion. Attacking this version of racial profiling is like attacking the racially motivated burning of churches. It is fine as long as one acknowledges that the target of the condemnation is, in the overall scheme of things, a rather marginal phenomenon. It is not so fine insofar as such rhetoric deepens public confusion. Much of the talk about police "targeting" of suspects on the basis of race is, in this sense, misguided and harmful. It diverts attention from the major part of the story to a side issue.

The better definition of racial profiling embraces a much more widespread police practice: using race as a factor in deciding whom to place under suspicion and/or surveillance. Relatively few police officers detain a person solely on the basis of race. Not even Mark Fuhrman was known to detain elderly women who happened to be black. Much more typical is questioning or detaining a person because of the confluence of a variety of factors—age (young), dress (hooded sweatshirt, baggy pants, etc.), time (late evening), geography (the person is walking through the "wrong" neighborhood)—that include race (black). It is the confluence of such factors that constitutes the profile that triggers police attention. Properly understood, then, racial profiling occurs whenever police routinely use race as a negative signal that, along with an accumulation of other signals, causes an officer to react with suspicion.

Thus, we must be skeptical and realistic as we watch and participate in the growing debate over racial profiling. One danger that I have already mentioned is the threat of demagoguery through oversimplification. When politicians discuss "racial profiling," we must insist that they define precisely what they mean and ask in particular whether they merely reject police surveillance based solely on race or whether they also condemn police surveillance that is at all triggered by a racial factor (except in the exceptional circumstances I have noted). Another danger is evasion—putting off making hard decisions in the guise of needing more information. This motivation, I fear, is behind Clinton's directive ordering federal agencies to gather statistics on the racial demographics of stops, questionings, and arrests. There is no mystery about whether federal and state police agencies use race routinely in making determinations of suspicion. Officials have said repeatedly that they do. The issue is whether the Clinton administration is willing to go beyond easy rhetoric and actually direct federal law enforcement personnel to cease their routine use of race as a factor in selecting subjects to scrutinize or question. On this point, Bradley was right when he criticized Gore for promising to end racial profiling only after he's elected president. The Clinton-Gore administration does not need to wait for court rulings or legislation or more data. It can and should act now. True, the federal government's law enforcement agencies are smaller than the combined forces of local and state authorities. But the DEA, the FBI, the Border Patrol, and other federal agencies are still important. And state and local cops often emulate their policies.

FINALLY, IT MUST be soberly acknowledged that, even if this or any other administration does prohibit routine racial profiling, the practice will not cease quickly. After all, it will be difficult to prove that an officer made a given decision on a partly racial basis if he or she keeps silent regarding the racial aspect of his or her decisions and mentions, when pressed, only the nonracial cues. Moreover, supervisors and judges would probably be loath to reject an officer's proffered nonracial explanation. For one thing, doing so would typically lead not only to concluding that an officer acted on an unlawful basis but also, generally, to ruling that the officer lied about his or her conduct. Generalized avoidance of such confrontations is a fact of social psychology—albeit one that enables a considerable amount of illegal racial discrimination to pass undisturbed.

Even so, it would be helpful for Clinton to promulgate a strict anti-discrimination directive now. That would at least send a signal to conscientious, law-abiding officers that there are certain criteria they ought not to use. If nothing else, it might force racial profiling into the realm of conduct that officers may practice on the sly but don't dare admit to. To be sure, it's not optimal to create a norm that can't be fully enforced. But even if it can't be, that should just encourage us all to work that much harder to close the lingering gap between our laws and the actual conduct of those in positions of public authority. Even if a new rule against racial profiling would, to some degree, be made to be broken, it would still be worth having—for it would at least help set a new standard for legitimate government. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Mastery and Misery

MONTLUC PRISON IN Lyon, much used by the Germans during their occupation of France, now appears in a second film. The first was Robert Bresson's *A Man Escaped* (1956), a masterpiece of such purity that it makes me catch my breath just to remember it. Now comes a film by Claude Berri, **Lucie Aubrac** (USA), in which Montluc, during the Occupation, figures prominently, although it is not the principal setting that it was in Bresson. Berri, who surely knows Bresson's film, simply wanted to tell a true story (as did Bresson) that involves Montluc, so the repetition was unavoidable.

And unfair to Berri. Skilled though he is, reserved and truthful, he could not have been intending to rival Bresson. In fact, it increases one's respect for Berri that he was willing to risk the comparison because he wanted to tell this story.

Lyon in 1943. The Germans, enthusiastically abetted by the French fascist police and militia, have the region in their grip. Lucie Aubrac, a non-Jew, is happily married to Raymond Aubrac, a Jew who changed his family name from Samuel. They have a small son. Both Lucie and Raymond are in the Resistance, with Raymond fairly high in the organization. At the start Raymond is the more active of the two: the film begins as he helps in the bombing of a German troop train. But after the Germans, with French police assistance, sniff him out and arrest him, the dynamics of the story shift to Lucie.

May 14, an important date in their married life for personal reasons, will find Raymond in prison. The day before, Lucie visits the French judge in charge of the case and tells him quietly that if Raymond is not out of prison on the morning of the 14th, he (the judge) will not see the sunset on that day. She leaves. Raymond is released.

But he is soon re-arrested, trapped at a meeting of Resistance commanders to which the police have been tipped off by a traitor. Much of the action then concerns Montluc and the treatment that Raymond undergoes there as well as at German headquarters. The dynamics remain with Lucie, however, as she plans for his rescue. Using a false name, she visits various German commanders, including the now-notorious Klaus Barbie, tells them that she is unmarried (false), pregnant (true), that Raymond is the father (also true), and that she wants to be married to him even though he is going to be executed, so that her child will have a name. A German official arranges for a brief ceremony to be held in his office, which is the opportunity for Lucie and her Resistance friends to do their job.

The film ends with a signed endorsement of it by Lucie Aubrac, whose survival and approval provide an extra tingle. It also helps to explain why Berri wanted to make the picture, even though it is, in a general sense, familiar: another account of resistance under the German occupation. First, this story is factual; second, the protagonist is still with us; third, though this is certainly not unique, that protagonist is a woman.

But these factors are not what keep us absorbed throughout. The film itself holds us. Berri, who began his career as a sentimentalist, then declined even from that plane to mere manufacturer, has ascended in recent years into artistry. His two films based on Marcel Pagnol, *Jean de Florette* and its sequel *Manon of the Spring*, caught perfectly Pagnol's Zolaesque earthiness, tempered with the ache of rural ballad. Berri's actual Zola film, *Germinal*, wandered in structure but not in tone. Through that film and even through the lesser *Uranus* and *Queen Margot*, Berri has been moving toward quiet control. *Lucie Aubrac* is directed with restraint yet insistence, with a conviction that Berri felt he needed only to tell the story—clearly—without underscoring. (The first-class cinematographer and editor were Vincenzo Marano and Hervé de Luze.)

Carole Bouquet plays Lucie and surprises us. Up to now she has not been much more than a lovely woman with a trademark smile. Berri hasn't transmuted her into a top-rank actress, but he has certainly sounded whatever depths, whatever pools of heat, are in her. In the intimate scenes with Raymond, it's impossible to doubt the truth of Lucie's love. Daniel Auteuil, as Raymond, is no surprise. His performances always have the texture of fine cloth from a master weaver—always fitting the occasion, whether the gnarled peasant in the Pagnol films or this tacitly heroic Resistance officer. Something more than a footnote about the cast: the bookseller who shares Raymond's Montluc cell for a time is played by Jean Martin, one of Beckett's favorite actors, who was the first Lucky in *Waiting for Godot* and the first Clov in *Endgame*.

One of the recurrent puzzles in the film world is why gifted actors appear in arrant junk. Sure, anyone can make mistakes (the usual cop-out), but it is possible to abuse the privilege. Every actor would rather work than not, but isn't idleness better than wallowing in garbage? Money? It would be obtrusive to speculate about the wealth of the people involved in this latest stinker, but it's hard to believe that they are needy.

Then why did they do it? Could Peter Ustinov, who is, of course, himself the author of light-fingered plays and novels as well as an actor of vast experience, possibly have believed that there was an iota of sparkle in an alleged Victorian parody called **Stiff Upper Lips** (Cowboy)? And Prunella Scales, enormously versed in everything from tragedy to such reliable farce as *Fawlty Towers*, what could she have seen in this midden? And Frank Finlay, he who was once Olivier's Iago, with reputable work before and after that performance, has he pursued his career in order to play a butler in a comedy whose idea of a joke is to have him pee in the family's soup? (I'm not vindictive: I will refrain from naming the author and director.)

I take these actors' bad choices personally because I sometimes decide to see an otherwise unpromising film because of its cast. As I did with this picture. What's worse, if these actors happen to be together in another film, I'll be tempted again. Usually, even if the picture disappoints, the performances of eminent actors may compensate. Not this time. Ustinov, Scales, Finlay, please! Be careful. Think of others. ■

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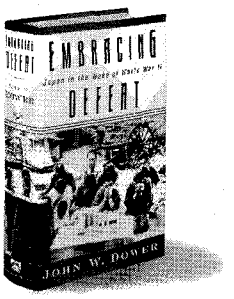

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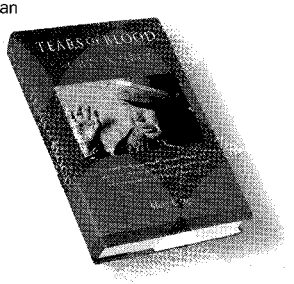

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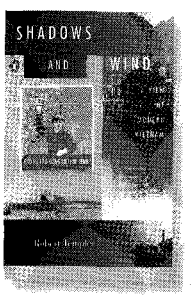

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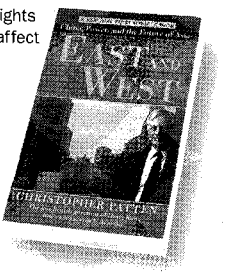

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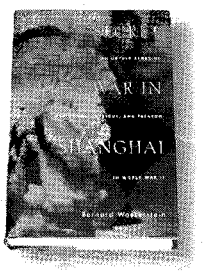

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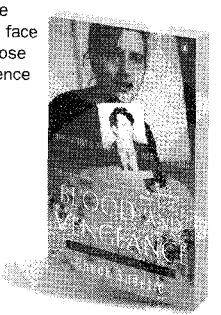

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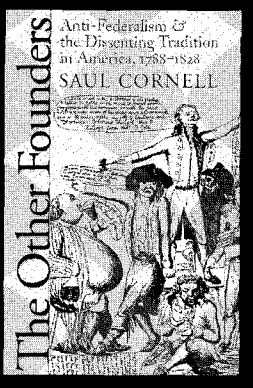

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The heroism, and the failure, of humanitarianism

The Un-ugly American

By DAVID RIEFF

The Man Who Tried to Save the World: The Dangerous Life and Mysterious Disappearance of Fred Cuny by Scott Anderson

(Doubleday, 374 pp., $24.95)

I.

FOR ALL THAT remains unknown, and despite the speculation that has surrounded what is known, the facts of Fred Cuny's disappearance and death are brutally straightforward.

On the morning of March 31, 1995, the fifty-one year old American relief worker, a legend in the world of humanitarian aid, who was then working under contract for the New York-based Soros Foundation, left Sleptsovskaya, a small border town in the southern Russian republic of Ingushetia in the Caucasus, and headed into Chechnya. There was war in the Caucasus, as there is now. Cuny was on what aid workers call a "needs-assessment" mission, a catch-all term that can mean anything from trying to work out a specific technical problem to having a look at what was going on. Before getting into the gray Russian-built UAZ ambulance that he had been using for transport since his arrival in the Caucasus a few days earlier, Cuny spoke briefly with Elisabeth Socolow, a Soros official based in Moscow who was backing up his work in the field. He told her that he expected to be in Chechnya for a day at the most.

Four other people made the trip with Cuny: Ruslan Muradov, a Chechen driver; Andrei Sereda and Sergei Makarov, two ethnic Russian doctors from Chechnya who worked for the Russian Red Cross; and Galina Oleinik, Cuny's interpreter and assistant, an ethnic Slav from South Ossetia. But Cuny was no stranger to Chechnya. He had been in Grozny a few months earlier, when the fighting between Russian forces and Chechen separatists in the Chechen capital was at its height. During that visit, Cuny had moved around in the same way that the Chechen fighters who were his guides moved around: through the sewer system. Above ground, Grozny was burning.

Cuny was also no stranger to war. Brave to the point of foolhardiness, he did nothing to dampen his reputation as a man who was willing to take almost any risk to accomplish his goal. In the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War, he had moved around in U.S. military helicopters that he had managed to commandeer through a combination of bluff and charm, trying to enlist Kurdish guerrilla commanders to move their people into the security zone that the American military was establishing in the lowlands. In Sarajevo, he was famous for his insouciance under fire. In a city where people tended not to wear flashy clothes lest the Serb snipers on the surrounding hills notice them and fire, Cuny ostentatiously wore a bright orange parka, as if defying them to shoot.

I first met Cuny in Sarajevo in January, 1993. I remember once standing with him in a frontline position as the shots began to ring out. Cuny was indifferent to it all. He stared up toward the Serb positions, then looked down at the Bosnian capital below, and said in his Texas drawl: "Damn, what a beautiful city it is! If only I could get those Chetniks off these hills." And he did not leave that insanely exposed spot until he had done what he had come there to do. But Sarajevo, bad as it was, was a walk in the park compared to Chechnya. In the winter and spring of 1995, Chechnya was certainly the most dangerous place in the world. Every journalist who was there (I was not) and was also in Bosnia or Rwanda insists that Chechnya was indescribably worse. A statistic makes the point. In Sarajevo, at the height of the siege, the city was taking 3,000 to 3,500 shells a day. In Grozny, the Chechen capital, the count of incoming fire was up to 4,000 shells an hour.

The experience shook Cuny, and for

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good reason. "It's the scariest place I ever been," he told people after his return. Soon after he got back to the States, he wrote an influential piece for the *New York Review of Books* entitled "Killing Chechnya," in which he laid out a scenario of almost unimaginable bleakness and barbarity if the war continued unchecked. The Russians, he wrote, were engaged in "fruitless combat for an objective that is ultimately meaningless." Cuny was convinced that, one way or the other, Chechnya would eventually break away from Moscow. For him, the only question was what the human toll would be before this happened.

Cuny's own concern with minimizing the humanitarian costs of this senseless war dovetailed with George Soros's conviction that the war in Chechnya was serving the interests of the most undemocratic and nationalistic elements within the Russian establishment. It was natural that he would turn to Cuny. In fact, the association between Soros's Open Society Institute and Intertect, Cuny's company, dated back to the Bosnian war. In 1992, on the advice of Morton Abramowitz, who had been the American ambassador to Thailand during the Cambodian refugee crisis and ambassador to Turkey during Operation Provide Comfort, Soros hired Cuny. The plan was to try to restore essential services, above all water and gas, to Sarajevo.

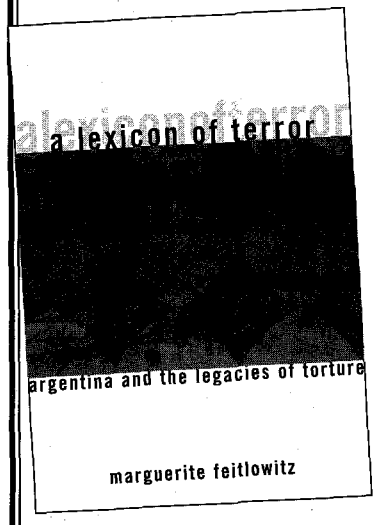
The project seemed like a fantasy, a typically grandiose Fred Cuny idea that stood no chance of succeeding. The United Nations had failed—famously caustic about that organization, Cuny once quipped that "if the UN had been around in 1939, we'd all be speaking German"—and so had governments. The logistical obstacles seemed insurmountable. Even if the necessary materials could be assembled and brought into the Sarajevo airport, it seemed a forgone conclusion that the Serbs would refuse to allow them to be shipped through their siege lines.

But Cuny made it work. Through his network of connections in the American military—links that had been forged in the Kurdish operation and during the planning for the humanitarian intervention in Somalia, which Cuny had helped to devise—he arranged for special water purification and pumping equipment, modified so that it could be loaded into the belly of a C-130 transport plane, to be brought in to the Bosnian capital as part of the humanitarian airlift that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had been running since the previous summer. From there, he talked the equipment through Serb checkpoints.

Cuny's success in mobilizing vast numbers of ordinary Sarajevans to dig up their own streets, often under fire, to put in gas lines, was even more remarkable—particularly in a country where half a century of communism, not to mention the psychic deformations of wartime, had all but extinguished any spirit of voluntarism. Yet his experience in Sarajevo did not end well. His nearly miraculous successes were partly undermined by the Bosnian government's ambivalent response to his efforts. Some commentators, such as the erstwhile supporter of the Bosnian government George Kenney, have implied that the Bosnians were fearful of the fickleness of the Western public and did not want to see conditions in the capital improve to the point at which sympathy for their cause would evaporate. This was the cynical view of Bosnian Muslim behavior that was expressed by the Bosnian Serbs and their sympathizers at the time. The likelier explanation is that the ex-communist apparatchiks who made up the senior staff at most of the ministries with which Cuny had to collaborate were fearful of having their own power diminished by this American outsider, and they put their own interests above that of Sarajevo's population.

Still, Bosnia seemed to demonstrate that, properly used, and with the consistent and reliable cooperation of the local partner in the afflicted areas, Cuny's approach could work in other crises.

A New York Times Book Review Notable Book of 1998



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—*The New York Review of Books*

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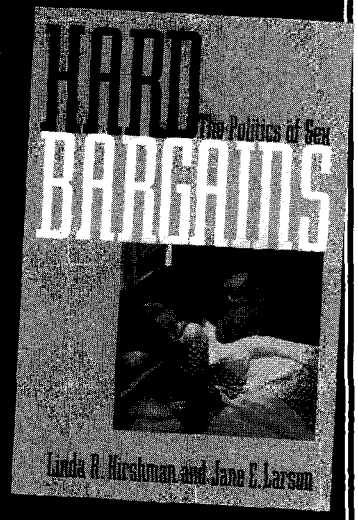

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Cuny's success in Sarajevo seemed to demonstrate to Soros, and to the Foundation's president Aryeh Neier, that his brand of practical humanitarianism could be a vehicle through which the Soros Foundation's agenda of creating "open societies" could be eventually advanced. With other areas in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union seemingly melting down in something of the same way the former Yugoslavia had done, Soros sent Cuny on a number of missions. In Albania, Cuny set up a series of successful programs. (Some of them are still running, despite the civil war of 1997 and the recent disaster in Kosovo.)

In February, 1995, Cuny went to Chechnya, with a contract from Soros. He returned with an audacious plan to end the fighting. There were thirty thousand civilians, the majority of them elderly ethnic Russians, still trapped in Grozny. (The Chechens had fled soon after the shooting started). Cuny's idea was to arrange a humanitarian ceasefire so that these people could be evacuated, and then, once the ceasefire was in place, to jumpstart the peace talks. In Washington, Cuny lobbied tirelessly, giving numerous briefings to senior officials from the State and Defense departments and the Intelligence establishment, including Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, and Assistant Secretary of Defense Walter Slocombe. Their response was interested but noncommittal.

COURTESY DOUBLEDAY

Fred Cuny in Somalia, 1992

Events on the ground in Chechnya were changing fast. The fighting in the capital had subsided. The war was mostly taking place in the countryside. Cuny was still convinced that he could use the instrument of humanitarian action to get the fighting stopped, but he also understood that he had to revise his plan. Since Cuny's death, a number of friends and former colleagues have reported that they tried to dissuade him from going back, and they have described Cuny's own apprehensions about returning. Even when Cuny arrived in Moscow in March, before flying south to Chechnya, a number of Russian acquaintances tried to get him to cancel his trip. Sergei Kovalyov, the leading human rights activist in Russia, is said to have implored Cuny not to make the journey.

But Cuny was an immensely self-confident man. Not to have gone back to Chechnya would have been unthinkable. Still, the route that he chose, on leaving Sleptsovskaya on March 31, was particularly perilous. Traveling anywhere outside Grozny was risky, for it obliged journalists or aid workers to cross a frontline between territory controlled by Russian forces and territory controlled by the Chechen rebels. The chances of being kidnapped—a danger in any war zone but especially in the Caucasus, which remains a region of banditry—was very great.

Cuny and his companions were heading for the town of Bamut. It was not a place that, on the face of things, required a humanitarian needs-assessment mission. Bamut was not a population center. For months, it had been the epicenter of the fighting. So why did Cuny, if he was trying to understand what the civilian population was facing, go almost immediately to Bamut? The mystery begins there.

II.

Scott Anderson believes that Cuny was uncharacteristically worried on the day that he and his companions set out from Sleptsovskaya. In *The Man Who Tried to Save the World*, he has attempted to chronicle Cuny's life and to resolve the unanswered questions that surround his disappearance and his death. In Anderson's recreation of Cuny's final hours in Sleptsovskaya, he recounts Cuny's last conversation with Elisabeth Socolow. Responding to his uncharacteristically flat tone, Socolow had asked him if everything was all right. His reply, she told Anderson, was curious. "Just think about me," he said to her. Then he hung up the phone. Anderson is also struck by a poem that Cuny had taped behind his desk in the Intertect office in Dallas shortly before returning to Chechnya (it was discovered later by his son):

> Do not mourn for me,
> For I have lived as few men have,
> With honor served
> For those whom God forgot.

Did Cuny have a premonition that he would not return? It is impossible to know. At least Anderson refrains from going down the path taken by a PBS "Frontline" documentary on Cuny's life, which seemed to imply that the failure of his Sarajevo project, combined with the end of a love affair and his inability to secure a senior post in the American government, had made him reckless or even eager to die.

But Anderson still insists on a tight and transparent story, on a solution to the mystery. His romantic book is written more like an adventure story than a conventional biography, and it is most powerful when it narrates Anderson's own attempts to retrace Cuny's last journey. Anderson himself took tremendous risks. The book opens with his own trip to Bamut, where he, too, was arrested by Chechen fighters. After such an experience, to be sure, reticence comes hard; but it is surprising that the fearfully arbitrary quality of Anderson's close call—he never found out why he was seized, nor why he and his friends were released—did not make him more wary of reading complex and sinister meanings into Cuny's disappearance and death.

Certainly, such speculations have been rife almost from the moment Cuny went missing. There were suggestions that he was a CIA agent; and also that the Russians were angry about Cuny's pro-Chechen sympathies and arranged for his murder through their double agents on the rebel side. Anderson offers an even shadier possibility. Given Cuny's renown among the Chechens, he is convinced that low-level commanders would never have taken it upon themselves to kill Cuny and his colleagues. Anderson believes that the order probably came from the Chechen leader himself, Dzhokhar Dudayev. He places Dudayev in Bamut for at least part of the time in which Cuny was held, but before he was murdered.

Anderson does not claim to know precisely what happened, but he advances two possible reasons for Dudayev to have ordered the death of a man who was

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widely admired by Dudayev's own followers and had become a friend of General Aslan Maskhadov, Dudayev's chief of staff. The first is that Dudayev, who was on the run from the Russians (eventually they would get him, keying a smart bomb to his cell phone and blowing him to bits), needed to prove to his followers that what Anderson calls "the steady diet of paranoid propaganda" that he fed the Chechen people, the tales of spies and death squads in the pay of Moscow combing the countryside for him, had some basis in reality. Dudayev's own commanders were losing confidence in him, and killing Cuny and his colleagues as "spies" would have been "a cheap and easy way to bolster his claims."

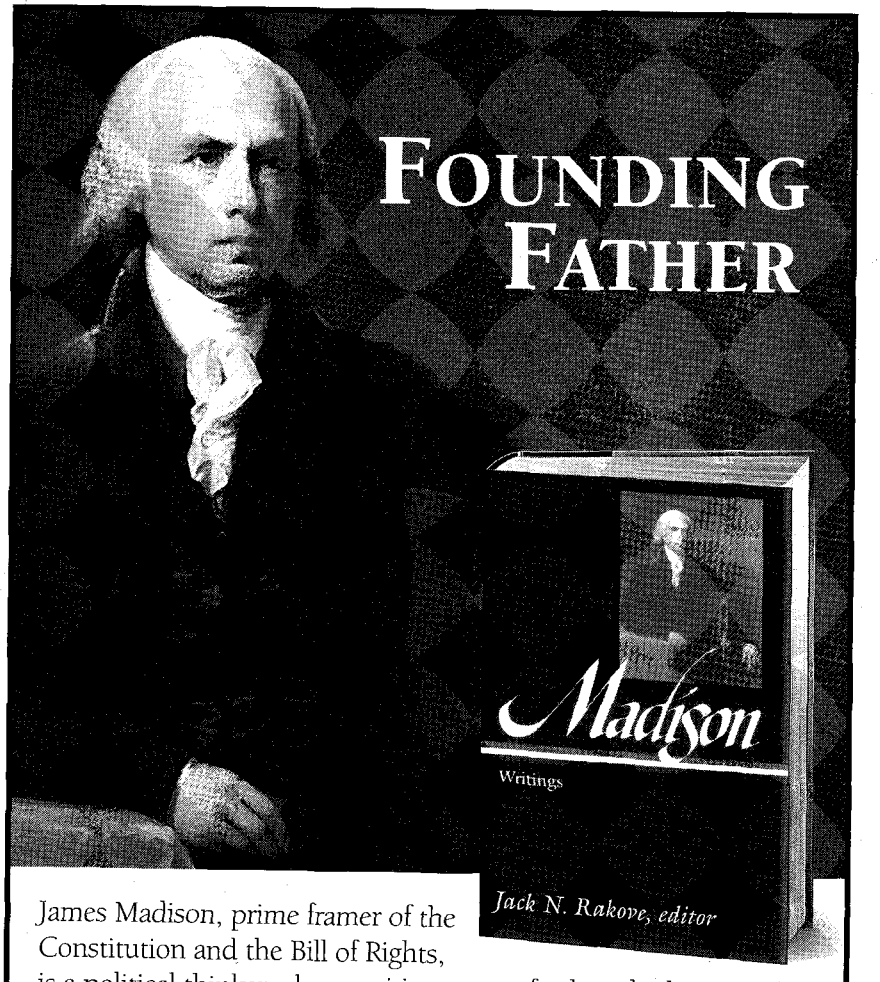
THE SECOND EXPLANATION is pure Le Carré. It is that Bamut was the site of a Soviet nuclear weapons facility that was de-commissioned in 1987. Rumors about the Chechens having nuclear weapons had abounded since the beginning of the war. In Soviet times, Dudayev had commanded a strategic bomber wing in the far north of the USSR. According to a Ukrainian Lieutenant-Colonel whom I once met when he was working for the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Tajikistan, Dudayev had been a highly regarded and technically knowledgeable officer. My informant should have known: he was Dudayev's executive officer.

From 1992, when Chechnya unilaterally seceded from the Russian Federation, until the war started almost three years later, Dudayev kept hinting that his forces had nuclear weapons and would use them if Russia attacked. The notion was not completely crazy: before the war, you could buy almost anything in Chechnya. It is certain that at least some senior Russian commanders and politicians took Dudayev at his word. They reasoned that the only safe place for the Chechens to store the weapons would be at the Bamut base, where the bunkers and the missile silos were intact.

Anderson believes that in fact the Chechens never had these weapons, but that Dudayev played on Russian fears to force them to concentrate their attack on Bamut. Owing to its maze of bunkers, the town was far easier to defend than many of the other rebel strongpoints. And in order to ensure that the Russians were drawn to Bamut, which was very much to the Chechens' advantage, nobody would be allowed to discover that there were in fact no nuclear weapons there at all. The important thing about bluffs, as Anderson observes, "is that they have to be even more closely protected than the real thing." Anderson's point is that Cuny and his companions were killed because they might have revealed the truth. "Perhaps [Dudayev] suspected Fred or one of his companions of having a hidden agenda in coming to Bamut, to sniff out just what was inside the missile silos at the base of town. Or perhaps he simply decided he couldn't take that chance."

Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps. One of the most frustrating aspects of Anderson's book is the way it oscillates between sensible reportorial caution and a taste for convoluted causes. Anderson was incredibly diligent in tracking down everyone who claimed to know anything about Cuny's murder; but as he himself points out, most of these accounts are deeply flawed and impossible to verify. As for the Americans, they have not a clue about Cuny's fate. The Russians also claim to know nothing, and this time they may be telling the truth. The only figure who might have been able to establish the facts was Aslan Maskhadov, Dudayev's second-in-command and Cuny's erstwhile friend. Maskhadov is now president of Chechnya, and for obvious reasons he has never spoken of the matter, even after a last desperate letter, almost unbearable to read, from Galina Oleinik, Cuny's assistant, pleading for his intercession. The letter was recovered in August 1996, along with the bloodstained passports and identity cards of Cuny and his colleagues.

It is, obviously, an extraordinary story. But Anderson's notion of the biography as



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thriller invites skepticism. For there are other ways of accounting for what happened to Cuny that are certainly no more implausible, though they would not make a good spy movie. The first is plain bad luck. Anybody who has traveled in the anarchy of war zones has lived with the knowledge that at the next checkpoint some psychotic teenager may force you out of your vehicle and kill you. The gun-toting kid may be stoned, or angry at a superior. He may just want to show off for his mates. In the orphan wars of the poor world in the aftermath of the Cold War, those are reasons enough for murder; reasons that are no reasons at all.

Anderson himself had precisely this experience in Chechnya. He writes of being brought before a commander, very near where Cuny and his colleagues were held, and of believing that he was about to die. It is an extraordinary piece of writing, conveying the terror and the hopelessness of having stumbled into a situation from which there is no escape. And then, unaccountably, Anderson and his colleagues are freed. Anderson toys with the idea that the Chechens have let him go because something that he said got through to them; but then it occurs to him that it was only "a capricious shift in the executioner's heart." It may have been a capricious swing in the other direction that cost Cuny and his colleagues their lives.

ANDERSON'S SPECULATIONS about why Cuny went to Bamut overlook another highly unromantic possibility. Many people who knew Cuny, and who agree that the decision to go to Bamut made no sense from a strictly humanitarian perspective, believe that he traveled there to secure an interview with Dzhokhar Dudayev that he hoped to sell to ABC News. Cuny did approach David Gelber, then the producer of the documentary series "Peter Jennings Reports" and, while he made no firm commitment, Gelber expressed interest, as any reporter or producer would have done.

Cuny certainly thirsted for the limelight. Anderson quotes copiously from various diary entries in which Cuny made lists of the improbable things that he hoped to accomplish, from climbing a mountain and naming it after himself, to serving at the most senior levels of government, to sleeping with the most beautiful woman in the world. In and of themselves, these fantasies have no particular significance; a man under extraordinary pressure was merely letting off some steam. Far more serious was Cuny's hunger for celebrity. After Sarajevo, and his acceptance in Washington, and the sponsorship of the Soros Foundation, his craving for fame had grown exponentially. The idea that he could have a similarly aggrandizing relationship with a network news organization may have been irresistible. But the truth is that neither Anderson nor anyone else knows what actually happened to Fred Cuny.

III.

SCOTT ANDERSON'S REDUCTION of his subject to the status of a movie hero, his lurid characterization of Fred Cuny as "the man who tried to save the world," leeches him not just of his complexity, but also of his place in the world of humanitarian aid that he did so much to shape in the decade before his death. Anderson captures Cuny's personality, but he has utterly failed to understand his work. For Cuny was not just another adventurer. He *was* his work. How he lived is just as important as how he died.

Cuny was, first and foremost, a humanitarian aid worker. Whatever his motive in traveling to Bamut, it was humanitarianism that he died for. You would not know this from Anderson's book. He describes Cuny in the 1990s as a man who "had finally found his niche in the murky confluence of humanitarian aid, diplomacy, intelligence, and military action." This utterly mischaracterizes Cuny's role. He may have relished being thought of as a CIA agent, and he certainly reveled in the access he could obtain in Washington; but Cuny's bedrock identity was that of relief worker.

Relief is a very complicated activity. And humanitarianism is a system, getting its funds from a wide array of sources ranging from individual contributions to government grants. Some private aid groups, notably faith-based organizations such as World Vision or Caritas, but also private aid groups such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), can count on enough private donations to be able to operate in areas in which the principal institutional donors—the United States government, the European Union, and United Nations agencies such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or the World Food Programme (WFP)—have no interest.

Aid is also a business, though it is not a particularly profitable business by any ordinary corporate standard. Indeed, Cuny's company Intertect was organized along far more conventional business lines than mainline American aid groups such as the International Rescue Committee. Cuny supported himself with contracts; and the magnitude of his company's debt to the Soros contracts was a subject of constant speculation among other aid workers during the Bosnian war. I do not mean to imply that Cuny was in the aid business for the money. (He would have been better off putting his extraordinary mind and logistical skills at the disposal of an oil company or the risks-assessment department of a merchant bank.) But it is important to understand the grimy realities behind the great idealism exemplified by Cuny and Cunyism—to understand the actual workings of what Alex de Waal has called "the humanitarian international."

MUCH CANT HAS been written about the humanitarian enterprise, by its critics and by its defenders. But take all the hype away, and the fact remains that humanitarian intervention has been one of the great hopes of the 1990s. What began, as one delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross put it, as an effort "to bring a measure of humanity, always insufficient, into situations that should not exist," developed into something far more politically and morally ambitious, and into an idea that, particularly in Western Europe, captured the imaginations of vast numbers of people. The Dutch section of MSF, for example, has a donor base of 800,000 people, in a country of 16 million.

The annual report of MSF in 1995 was quite correct in claiming that "all over the world, there is unprecedented enthusiasm for humanitarian work." But as the authors of the report were quick to add, this enthusiasm was a mixed blessing. When humanitarian aid, as they rightly put it, "acquired a near monopoly [on] morality and international action," when the Western response to the siege of Sarajevo was to send emergency relief supplies and its response to the Rwandan genocide was to set up camps in Congo for the refugees, "it is doomed to failure."

Most serious humanitarian workers understood this by the mid-1990s, but there was little agreement about what to do next. They could denounce the failures of governments to act. "We're doing our job, it's the politicians who have gone on strike": this was how one ICRC delegate once put it to me bitterly. And they could hope for better times. Both operationally and intellectually, however, the history of humanitarian action in the '90s has been one of increasing contradiction and incoherence, all the bravery and the dedication notwithstanding. Humanitarianism has come increasingly to stand for the rejection of a political approach to the elimination of atrocity.

For all the talk of "best practices" and "do no harm"—the old Hippocratic slogan adapted by the American relief specialist Mary Anderson to cope with the realization that aid workers could actually

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exacerbate conflicts that they had come to alleviate—the various schools of humanitarianism have continued more or less along their chosen paths. The oldest of these schools is the Swiss school, the ICRC school. Committed to neutrality and discretion almost at any cost—it was the ICRC that chose not to reveal what it knew about the Nazi death camps, lest its work with prisoners of war be curtailed—the ICRC is the legally constituted custodian of the Geneva Conventions. Before the Biafran war of 1967, it was the principal organization working in war zones. In those days, CARE and Oxfam and other groups that now do emergency relief were then entirely committed to development work.

MSF was founded by a group of French doctors involved in the ICRC's effort in Biafra who were outraged by the Geneva-based organization's unwillingness to denounce the abuses that it saw taking place. MSF's version of the humanitarian enterprise combined the traditional charitable purpose of helping victims with the commitment to become public advocates for them. MSF workers insisted that they had the right and the obligation to document what they saw, and, when they thought it appropriate, to testify publicly about what was going on, and to call for concrete action to be taken. But MSF drew the line at politics. It is not that MSF has ever denied that its actions had political consequences; but the idea of going further—calling, say, for military intervention in Kosovo, or for the overthrow of the Government of Sudan to stop the genocide in the south of that country—has always seemed to them to pose too great a threat to their humanitarian role, which they believe requires them to remain impartial.

INDEED, THE ISSUE of whether humanitarian groups should call for political action, and even for military action, either by the United Nations or by an outside power, led to a split in MSF. Those who believed that only states and international organizations could carry out humanitarian missions that would be more than sops to conscience were led by Bernard Kouchner, one of the young French doctors who founded MSF and later went on to become French health minister and minister for humanitarian affairs. Kouchner pioneered the idea of what he dubbed "the right of intervention." When confronted with humanitarian suffering on a vast scale in states whose own governments had either caused the catastrophe or had no means of alleviating it, other states—or, more broadly, what Kouchner called "the international community"—had the obligation to act. For

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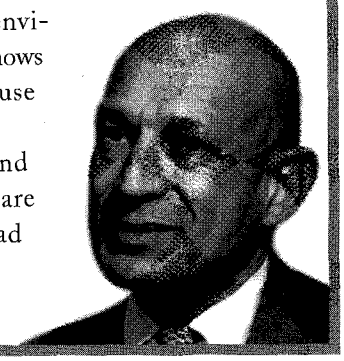

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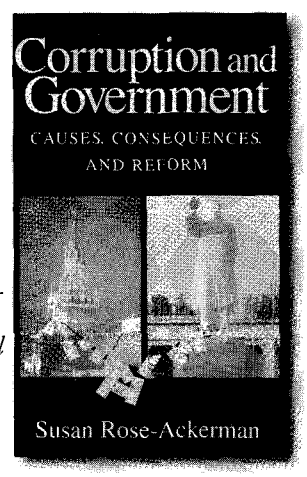

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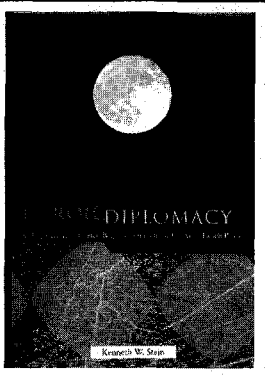

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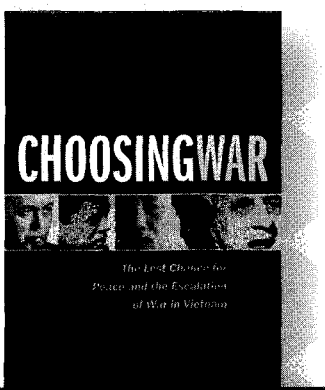

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him, the political necessity of ending, or, better yet, preventing conflicts, and the humanitarian imperative of aiding victims, have always been inseparable. Kouchner's view is that humanitarian disasters are almost invariably caused by human rights abuses; and those abuses are sufficient causes for political and military action. "Classic humanitarianism," he has written, "protects the victims and accepts war as a reality. Modern humanitarianism accepts no such thing. Its ambition is to prevent the massacres."

FOR AMERICAN AID workers, unlike their French counterparts, cooperation with governments came much more naturally. Unlike continental Europe, where humanitarianism was largely a by-product of the politics and the passions of May '68, the American humanitarian tradition was one in which the links between private voluntary organizations like the International Rescue Committee and the State Department had always been intense. Where French aid workers were likely to issue manifestos in the newspapers, their American counterparts tended to put their faith in lobbying up and down Pennsylvania Avenue. Cuny's own approach, for all the ways that it was highly nonconformist and untraditional, was in this essential sense the standard way in which American aid workers operated.

Where Cuny departed from the mean was in the degree of influence that he tried to command. At times, he hoped to set the political agenda, not just the humanitarian one. He never saw the point of a humanitarianism that chose to limit itself to delivering shelter materials or medical supplies, to setting up clinics and refugee camps. He wanted to address the causes of misery. And so he found the idea of eschewing politics, and publicly stated moral judgments, completely unacceptable. As Anderson correctly notes, he believed that aid workers could seize "on the 'opportunity of disaster' to build not only better houses but better societies."

Cuny's reading had led him to "chaos theory," to which he kindled. From the abstractions of physics he came away with the conclusion that chaos cuts both ways: it holds the possibility of further catastrophe, but also the possibility of a new reality. Whether it was Sarajevo under siege, or Kurdistan when the grip of Saddam Hussein's tyranny had been loosened, or Chechnya, Cuny's vertebral optimism remained unaffected. During his lifetime, much was made of the fact that his self-confidence in the field bordered on the egomaniacal; but in truth Cuny's faith in the people with whom (and for whom) he worked far outstripped his grandiose ideas about himself. He was convinced that, if given an opportunity, most people were brave enough, and smart enough, and resolute enough, to bring a just end to their own misery.

MOST AID WORKERS, though they witness spirit-crushing realities, tend to be optimists by nature. How else could they bear to live and to work in the circumstances in which they live and work? But Cuny was more than an optimist. His deepest contribution—more than his iron will, or his charisma, or his superb abilities as an organizer and a synthesizer of information—was his idea that the chaotic nature of almost every humanitarian crisis offered the aid worker the freedom for radically innovative responses that would not just alleviate the situation but also transform it. He was the most practical and the least practical of characters: an emergency utopian.

Like Kouchner, Cuny was convinced that only powerful states, and above all the United States, could act to confront and halt or ameliorate disasters such as Bosnia, Rwanda, or Somalia. This did not mean that he favored action all the time, or that his first or only instinct was to call for a military response. Indeed, the plan that he drafted at the American government's request for American humanitarian intervention in Somalia had expressly warned against committing troops to Mogadishu. But he saw clearly that states were far stronger than international institutions such as the United Nations, which many of his colleagues thought should take over the burden of coping with failed polities and humanitarian crises. This made Cuny even more determined to influence policy where it counted most, in Washington.

There was always something slightly contradictory about this aspect of Cuny's thinking. His brand of "state humanitarianism" was vastly different from Kouchner's. When Kouchner talked of it, he spoke not just as a pioneering aid worker but as someone who served as a Minister in the socialist government of François Mitterrand and, until his recent posting to Kosovo, in a somewhat more junior role under Lionel Jospin. He supported French actions in Bosnia, where they were insupportable, and the French "humanitarian" intervention in Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide, which was a genuine disgrace.

Kouchner, in short, went from being not political enough to being too political. To be sure, there is nothing wrong with an aid worker deciding to become a politician. In Europe, where the prestige of humanitarianism is far higher than it

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is in the United States, this has become almost commonplace. But Cuny was actually far less of a politician than he imagined. The real strength of this immensely savvy man was that he remained in some profound way naïve. And this strength was also a weakness. Had this not been the case, he might not have gotten so caught up in being able to brief senior government officials. He never really understood that Washington is a short-sighted and insincere maw that eats people like him for breakfast. Cuny knew how to address power effectively, to seduce with his charm and to persuade with his arguments; but he was also seduced by power and bedazzled by his access to it.

CUNY WAS ANYTHING but naïve about the abuses to which American power had been put, above all in Central America, where, in Guatemala in the mid-1970s, he had seen its dark side himself. I remember a conversation we had at the height of the siege of Sarajevo in which he tried to convince a skeptical Charles Lane (then *Newsweek*'s correspondent in Bosnia) and myself of the need to pursue a conciliatory policy toward Fidel Castro. But like many Americans, Cuny was hopelessly in love with the idea of American power as a force for good. And in the aftermath of the Cold War, the United States had the chance to prove it.

In Bosnia, certainly, it was the United States, alone among the great powers, that stood for a multi-ethnic state. The United Nations and the Western European states hungered for partition, almost on any terms, to bring the fighting to an end. And so strange alliances were made. Human rights activists who had come of age attacking American policy in Latin America found themselves making common cause with admirals and veterans of the Reagan administration. Anti-anti communists and cold warriors suddenly found themselves ardently on the same side.

For Cuny, whose politics are probably best characterized as populist liberal, this was as it should be. He was born in New Haven, Connecticut in 1944, and grew up in Dallas. As a student at Texas A&M, he wanted above all else to be a Marine pilot, and his failure to gain his commission was something (as Anderson has uncovered) that he dissimulated about to friends and colleagues throughout his life; but he was more than just a frustrated soldier. Cuny's career as an aid worker actually began when, as a very young man, he volunteered to dig wells and latrines in Mexican *colonías* along the south Texas border. Later he went on to work as a planner for the Johnson-era Model Cities Program. It was not until 1970 that he began to gravitate toward international relief efforts.

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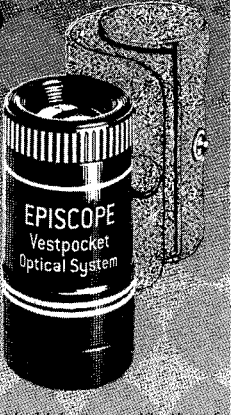

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He was, truly, the un-ugly American. In Kurdistan, he had almost single-handedly transformed and vastly expanded a mission whose original conception had been very limited. In Bosnia, he had used the international relief effort to purposes no one dreamed they could be put to. And in Chechnya, I think, he imagined that he could do the same.

Cuny himself never understood that Chechnya was not Bosnia. The difference was not only in the degree of the danger. What Cuny had never done was work in a place where the power of the American government was inconsequential; and in Chechnya, Washington counted for nothing. When he set out for Bamut, he had not misconstrued the risks. He had misconstrued a part of the reason for his own astonishing success. What he does not appear to have understood was that, for all his brilliance and his resourcefulness, his success had finally depended on the presence and the influence of the United States.

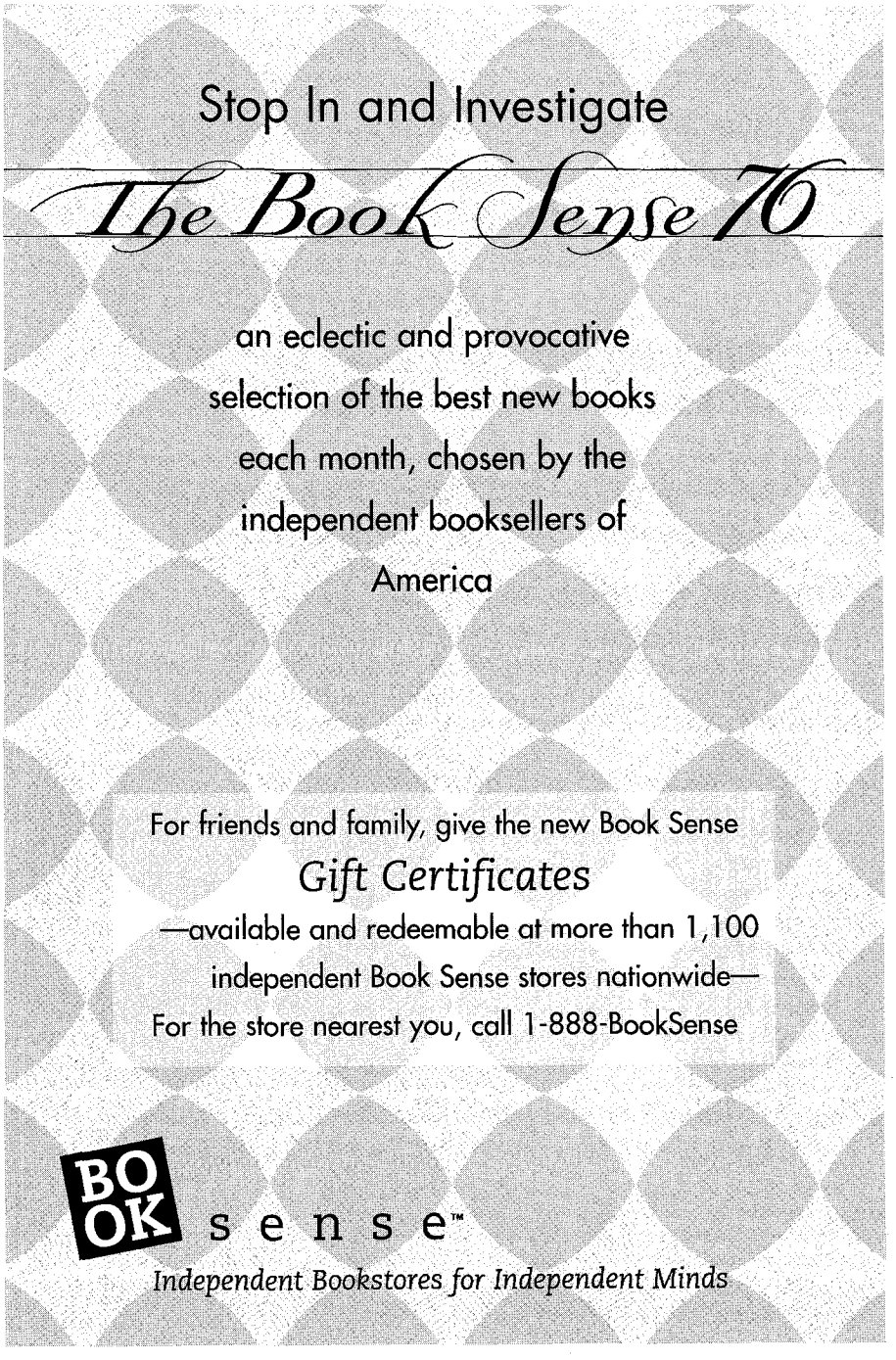
During the siege of Sarajevo, Cuny often insisted that the Serbs were afraid of him. Many of us scoffed at the idea; but in a sense, he was right. Karadzic and Mladic and the others may not have been afraid of Cuny personally, but the one power that they did fear was the United States, and Cuny was associated with American power. But not in Chechnya. This was the tragedy. In Chechnya, the American connection, and the Soros connection, were of no help at all. When Cuny drove toward the Chechen border on that dreadful day in late March 1995, he was alone as he had never been before in his professional life. When he was arrested—for whatever reason—no powerful outside force could intercede. Indeed, it has been impossible even to secure the return of his body. (In fine Caucasian fashion, there has been word recently that the corpse has been found, accompanied by a demand for ransom.)

UNTIL CHECHNYA, the case could be made that the successes of Cuny and his colleagues warranted the hopes that they raised. There were countervailing tendencies, of course. It was beginning to be clear that humanitarianism was also a fig-leaf used by the great powers in this age of CNN to give their outraged publics the sense that something was being done, when in fact there was no political will to do very much. Humanitarian responses are always emblems of failure, because the catastrophe has always already happened. This sober fact could also be viewed as strengthening the case for the kind of wised-up, politically committed humanitarianism that Cuny exemplified; but Cuny's death signaled the end of this hope.

The loss of faith in humanitarianism would have happened anyway, of course. There was really no alternative, given the gap between the moral ambitions of humanitarianism and its practical reach, except to return to a more modest self-conception. As for those groups that had thought to employ humanitarianism as a vehicle, the example of the Soros Foundation is emblematic. After Cuny's death, the decision was made that humanitarianism could not be the lever through which to effect social transformations or to obtain better political outcomes, if for no other reason than the rising tide of attacks on aid workers in the field.

For all that he would have understood the reasons, Cuny would have hated the enervated way in which humanitarianism developed after his death. He would have accused it of a failure of imagination, and a rattled refusal to exploit the opportunities that calamity always presents. Morton Abramowitz spoke for many people when he told Anderson that "I can't help thinking how much better things would be if Fred were around now."

And yet Cuny would also have been wrong. The lesson that has been drawn from his disappearance and death is, alas, the correct one—at least in many of the crises in which humanitarians now must work. It may well be that the choices have come down to state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humanitarianism (such as Operation Allied Force) or some version of the neutrality of the ICRC, perhaps amended to permit the kind of "witnessing" that MSF pioneered. Both have their costs and their moral limitations. It is not even clear that state humanitarianism is politically sustainable. The fact that Bernard Kouchner, its greatest proponent, is now the UN proconsul in Kosovo, makes events there particularly worth watching from a humanitarian perspective.

Yet Kosovo is in many ways a special case. There will be no equivalent of KFOR in the next Chechnya or the next Rwanda. And so the sort of muscular humanitarian action that Cuny pursued will be less and less feasible as time goes on. In no small measure because of his death, no one is suggesting a massive aid effort in Dagestan today. It is simply too dangerous.

What Fred Cuny did in Sarajevo, in Kurdistan, and in Albania, which was literally to make the difference between life and death for tens of thousands of people, is enough of a legacy for any man. Yet his legacy should not be mistaken for a glorious humanitarian future. The humanitarian enterprise itself is in crisis. Nobody has any answers for the new questions, and unfortunately it is not likely that Fred Cuny would have had the answers, either. ■

History's Toll

By LYNN HUNT

Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th-Century French Countryside by Alain Corbin translated by Martin Thom

(Columbia University Press, 416 pp., $35)

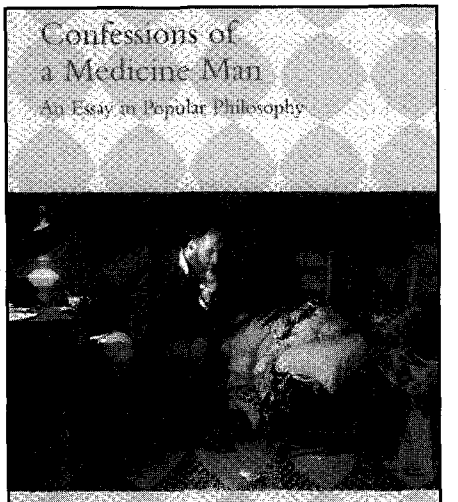
THE HISTORY OF bell ringing hardly seems like a major subject, but in this book the French historian Alain Corbin shows how village bells can be made to tell an alternative history, an auditory history, of France. Corbin has made a career out of rescuing such apparent trivialities from the dust-bin of history. A stream of innovative studies has flowed from his pen over the past two decades, making him now one of the most remarkable (and one of the most translated) historians in the world. This book forms part of an ongoing project on the history of perception, which promises to open new avenues of historical research and reflection. It is not just a recounting of the meaning of village bells as objects; it offers a re-thinking of the goals of history writing more generally.

Corbin's method of answering historical questions remains fairly traditional. To get at local conflicts over bells, for example, he investigates all the usual sources from police archives and government reports. More surprising and more promising is his way of posing questions in the first place. He asks why bells were the object of such passionate attachment, but he is not satisfied with framing this question in the customary social and political terms. Instead, Corbin asks how people heard their bells. He wants to "read" the auditory environment, to become "privy to an auditory patrimony that serves as an index of a deeper mode of existence."

In other words, he aims for a subtle understanding of the place of the body in historical context. In the wake of the controversial and influential works of Foucault, much has been written by feminists, multiculturalists, and devotees of cultural studies on "The Body." Yet hardly any of this work has gone beyond linguistic prescriptions about gender and sexuality to get at the kinesthetics—the feelings felt—of bodily experience. This, I think, is where Corbin is headed, even if he does not preface his efforts with grandiose pronouncements about his intentions.

Since Corbin does not write long preliminaries about his choice of method, its epistemological corollaries, or its claims to earth-shattering originality, his work has not received the systematic attention

LYNN HUNT teaches history at UCLA. With Victoria Bonnell, she is the co-editor of *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (University of California Press).



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that it merits. At a time of growing dissatisfaction with "French theory," with cultural studies, and with history written insistently in the frame of debunking, Corbin's approach certainly deserves to inspire closer study. It marks out a path to one of the most exciting new frontiers in historical work, which is the history of perception.

The history of perception is the study of the particular and contingent ways in which people use their senses and develop notions of space and time. Historians have always known that people in the past did not apprehend their worlds in the same way that we do; but with rare exceptions scholars never developed ways of ascertaining how the perceptual apparatus may have varied over time. The most important of those exceptions is Norbert Elias, whose study of "the civilizing process" in the West included a pioneering analysis of the changing threshold of shame about bodily functions. Corbin does not mention Elias and says virtually nothing about his own intellectual lineage, but like Elias he shows how the most traditional forms of documentation can be made to yield clues about historical variations in the modes of perception.

The empiricist cast of Corbin's argument also speaks volumes about current directions in historical work. Although an assiduous reader might detect a faint theoretical trace here or there, Corbin never lingers over theory. He uses the term "modernity," but this is not a book about "modernization" conceived in a lockstep fashion. Though it is a book about nostalgia as a state of mind, its analysis is not nostalgic: it is not a history of "the world we have lost." And unlike Foucault, who depicted the modern world as a carceral society shaped by insidious forms of discipline taught by educators, prison wardens, doctors, and therapists, Corbin portrays a world comprised of thousands of local conflicts between priests and mayors, parishioners of one village and another, local people and the national state. These conflicts exhibit a pattern and move in a direction, to be sure; but the pattern and the direction come from the inside of collective behavior as it unfolds.

Corbin came to the history of perception by persistently straying off the tried and true paths trodden by his contemporaries. Although he began, in 1975, in the canonical French fashion, with *Archaïsme et modernité en Limousin au XIXe siècle, 1845-1880*, an exhaustive work in two volumes on the social and political transformation of a nineteenth-century provincial backwater, he veered into risky territory three years later with a history of prostitution. At the time, hard as it is to imagine, the subject was considered unworthy of serious historians. And when such studies of gender and sexuality moved more into the mainstream of historical study, Corbin changed direction again, and in 1982 published *The Foul and the Fragrant*, a pathbreaking work on the history of smell. While continuing to publish occasional works that savor the particularities of local history, he has also written on "the lure of the sea," a topic that led him to an investigation into leisure-time activities more generally.

This congeries of topics and themes does not add up to a precisely defined historiographical agenda. It is the mark, rather, of a restlessly inquiring mind seeking out novel ways of situating bodies in their worlds. How did people come to experience going to the seaside as a moment of regeneration and renewal rather than a confrontation with the always unpredictable elements? When and why did strong smells come to seem repugnant? These are questions whose answers patiently build up a kind of phenomenology of bodily experience, understood not through philosophical abstractions in the manner of Bergson or Husserl, but through the piling up of concrete historical particulars. In this way Corbin hopes to get at "what is no longer current ... what is dismissed as absurd." This, he says, is a study of "the genesis of meaninglessness"—in the case of his new book, of how something once resonant lost its ability to be heard.

CORBIN'S STUDY OF village bells gives a very good sense of his method of operation. He begins by pinning down the history of contention over village bells. By associating bell ringing with clerical fanaticism, and by removing and destroying some fifty thousand tons of bells, the French Revolution succeeded in making church bells into the preeminent symbols of local identity, into plangent reminders of a disappearing world. In the nineteenth century, which is the chronological focus of Corbin's study, rival villages became so obsessed with bells that they actually "abducted" them. Since the revolutionaries had confiscated so many bells, parishes that eventually re-established regular church services were desperate for bells. They got them where they could; and disputes frequently arose over the rights to bells hidden in barns or discovered in transit from one location to another.

The stabilization of Catholic practice after the French Revolution did nothing to diminish the conflicts, which became endemic because bells had become so freighted with collective meaning. In 1806, the government complicated the

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foreword by Joan Hoff

"That the facts about Watergate are now as straight as they are, in spite of all official attempts to conceal them, is a tribute to Lukas's skill as a reporter and more broadly to the journalistic tradition he represents."
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situation when it decreed that the property of churches that had been merged into neighboring ones should be transferred to the churches that had been preserved. This sensible decision inadvertently fueled hundreds of flash fires of protest. Residents of subordinated parishes complained bitterly about the removal of their bells. Hearing "their" bell sound a few kilometers away, or even a few hundred meters away, created resentments that festered for decades.

When the relative size of parishes shifted, as they often did, and subordinate ones made claims for greater status, quarrels inevitably erupted over who owned which bells. In 1871, the village of Aize was still contesting the transfer of its bell to Buxeuil in 1809, and in its petition to the regional prefect the municipal council recounted once again all the details of the mistaken transport of the bell to the neighboring village 62 years before. A presidential decree finally restored the bell to Aize in 1872. When administrative recourse proved ineffective, parishioners threatened to take the law into their own hands, and sometimes they did. In 1847, the inhabitants of tiny Texon armed themselves with farm utensils, marched to neighboring Lavignac, and seized the church bell that had been taken from them in 1806 when the village had been administratively and religiously incorporated into Lavignac. Ten petitions for redress had been rebuffed by the prefect, the bishop, and the council of state.

ALTHOUGH THE FRENCH Revolution gave bells unexpected new significance, they always had important functions in rural communities. Corbin deftly depicts the ways in which church bells marked out both space and time. They oriented lost travelers, righted the routes of sailors lost in fog, and reminded peasants of their territory of social acquaintance. Villagers complained if they could not hear their bells from every point in the community.

During the nineteenth century, bells gradually transformed their temporal function. They had always signaled the times for daily prayer at dawn, noon, and dusk; and beckoned the faithful to mass on Sundays; and hailed the ritual moments of baptism and death. Increasingly they responded to the demands of modernity, serving as clocks for a population dependent more and more on precise knowledge of times. Although the clergy tried to counter the belief that bells could break up thunderstorms or set demons to flight, they zealously defended their bells against any manner of secular intrusion.

Corbin's portrayal of this "auditory environment" never condescends or prettifies with sentimental sonorities. He shows how every use of the bell was subject to debate and dissension. When one regional administrator in 1839 in the Gers department tried to ban ringing during thunderstorms, the local parish priests ignored him, arguing that the people would break down the church doors and strike the bells themselves. Different parishes chose different times for the ringing of morning and evening prayers, leading successive national governments to publish regulations stipulating exact times. Since such regulations were issued all through the century, it appears that they had little effect; some parishes rang the morning prayers as early as three a.m. in the summer, and everywhere the season and the type of work, rather than the national government, dictated the customary times.

The bells might have expressed the autonomy of local areas from national control, but they did not ring in communal unity. Everything about a bell was saturated with social distinction. When cast, they were inscribed with the names of "godfathers," "godmothers," and benefactors, or else with the names of the mayor, the parish priest, and the churchwarden. Before 1789, ritual moments in the life of the elite were marked by "peals of pride"—the unanimous knells of all the bells in town. After 1789, things changed: the prefect in Haut-Rhin complained in 1812 that "this kind of honor, being formerly reserved for persons of distinction,

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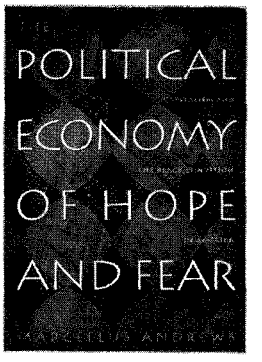

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is nowadays lavished upon anyone who can meet the expense."

Despite the efforts of some to claim that all mortals should be tolled equally, the social class of the deceased still determined the number of bells and the duration of the peals throughout the nineteenth century. Ringing lasted longer, and the bell used was bigger and heavier, for the baptism of boys than for the baptism of girls. The social hierarchy could be heard throughout the village, and in this way, we imagine, it quite literally penetrated every individual body, creating a lived sense of social differentiation.

SINCE THE BELLS belonged to the church, and the Catholic church was closely identified with a conservative, monarchical political position after 1815, the bells became more and more politicized as the nineteenth century wore on. Bells customarily rang for the passage of sovereigns, but this became far from ordinary in a country that had two emperors in the course of the century, two kings from different families, and two republics. In 1907, the republican government decreed that all the bells must ring a peal when the president of the Republic entered a village or town. Decrees are almost always signals of attempts to master conflicted situations, and this one no doubt should be read as such. Every momentous event in the life of the nation was marked by pealing bells, even though these events sometimes had the effect of canceling each other out. The bells greeted the return of the Bourbons in 1814, and they greeted the escape from exile of Napoleon in 1815.

Inevitably, in the nineteenth century, as the state encroached more and more on individual lives, secular authorities jealously spied on every opportunity to exercise control over the bells. Bells had long been used to convoke meetings of the village council, and with the progress of democracy it became the custom to ring the opening and the closing of the polls. Sometimes bells pealed for the victors. In many places bells rang for the arrival of the tax collector, though the parish priest in Lascazères objected so vehemently in 1828 that he tied up the bell rope and locked it away in the clock casing. Lay ringers sounded the bells to summon potential purchasers of property, to announce the distribution of soup to the poor, to call laborers to work on the public roads, to mark the beginning of harvest or the bringing down of flocks from the hills, to line up conscripts for the army, and even to signal garbage removal, though in the latter case a bishop in Coutances protested that this was "prostituting" the bells.

Some secular uses could not be contested: bells had always sounded the alarm for fires, which had been the original legal basis for all secular uses of bell ringing. Yet alarms could also signal political upheaval. A feverish clanging of the bell often marked the beginning of riots over bread prices or even insurrections against the government. Bells summoned brawlers to fight against a neighboring village; and in 1905-06 called on devoted Catholics to defend the property of their churches against republicans intent on separating church and state.

CORBIN DETECTS AN important shift in the political meanings of bell ringing. From 1830 onwards, after the installation of a more liberal, constitutional monarchy under Louis Philippe, bells became "an issue involving modernity." Conflicts over bells now pitted the local secular authorities, who were elected after 1831, against both the bishop and the prefect, the regional representative of the national government. Local magistrates sought to modernize their communities by constructing roads, setting up post offices, creating garbage dumps, and building schools. All these activities produced a new sense of urgency that seemed to demand accuracy, speed, and precise times—this was before the spread of clocks and watches. Between the 1830s and the 1860s, as a consequence, political conflicts over bells reached their apogee. In this case, the bells translated political changes into a new experience of time, which included a sense of rushing forward and needing to mark intervals ever more precisely.

Corbin offers a brilliant analysis of this subtle transformation of "auditory rhetoric." In their effort to get control of auditory messages, the secular authorities essentially tried to desacralize the bells. As more and more villages installed clocks on their bell towers, municipal authorities insisted that the bells should coincide with clock time and that the municipality should control both the clock and the bells. Every aspect of the clocks came into dispute. Alterations were sometimes carried out during mass, just to make a point. Priests changed the locks and denied entrance to rewinders. Mayors ordered clappers taken out of church bells and transferred to the communal clock chimes.

Such contests carried over into the choice of bell ringers. The parish priest usually picked the religious ringer; the mayor and council chose his secular counterpart. But the priest had the upper hand, because he controlled the keys to the bell tower. The priest refused to let the secular ringer into the church, or he would not let him come in by the main door. Sometimes—in Lézignan in 1833, for example—the village or town divided into warring parties and outsider mediators had to be called in. In 1884, a national law had to guarantee the mayor's access to the bell tower to ring secular peals.

PARADOXICALLY, AS DISPUTES over bells became more linked to issues of national policy, and as the press began to carry stories about these contests, the sounds of the bells began to matter less. The clergy maintained their control over the church bells in the end, but the bells ceased to produce the same emotional reverberation. After 1860, the number of bell towers steadily declined as the Catholic church consolidated services in a single church for each village. A mass exodus from rural areas began, and the spread of railroads, newspapers, and department store catalogues drained some of the energy invested in local identities. This shift of attention accompanied an improvement in the sound of bells, which were now heavier, more solid, and more tuneful. Sets of three, four, and even five bells became common. Local pride still demanded bells, but they no longer evoked the same depth of feeling.

Thus the reaction to sound did not depend on its actual aesthetic qualities. What determined, then, the emotion that was provoked by what was heard? Corbin shows that the process of casting bells affected the perception of the object itself. Until the 1850s, bells were manufactured right in the village by itinerant bell casters who worked in front of the parishioners. Villages sawed wood, fed the oven, buried the molds, worked the bellows, and stood by while the priest blessed the metal. They were present when first and second efforts at casting failed because the mold gave way or air bubbles ruined the metal. When the casting finally succeeded, they went off with the caster to celebrate at the local tavern or the mayor's home. Most bells were "christened" covered in lace, and the mayor and priest named a godfather or godmother for the bell. Industrial casting after 1860 made the process more reliable, but it also rendered the bells ordinary. The absence of risk and collective participation sapped the emotions associated with the sound. Hearing, after all, does not depend just on the ears.

Corbin's fine pages on the "material culture" of bell casting help explain why the Romantic literary trope of glorifying village bells appeared when it did, and why it held sway in particular between 1800 and 1860. When Schiller exalted the bond between bell and earth and Hugo invented the ultimate bell ringer in Quasi-

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modo, they were propagating the conviction that "the sound of the bell was itself an expression of rootedness." In the Romantic portrayal, the village bell gathered in memories, mixed past with future foreboding, in short, "anchored the gnawing sense of *nevermore*." Romantic bells sounded melancholy and forlorn.

Corbin's analysis of the social practices surrounding bells shows why these auditory perceptions were rooted in a very distinct period of time, despite their sense of creating a kind of eternally enduring, nostalgic-poetic space. Villagers felt the way they did about the sound of bells because the process of production, and the political and social conflicts engendered by it, made the bells seem theirs in every sense of the word. The tuneful noise penetrated their bodies and set the chords of memory vibrating. Even Napoleon confessed that whenever he heard the bells, he could not help "allowing myself to return to the earliest impressions of my life." Village bells created collective memories and then brought them forth for each individual.

After 1860, however, bells became increasingly associated with the clamorous din that kept people from their sleep. First in the cities and then gradually in the countryside, streetlighting, office work, and a generally faster pace of life uprooted the standardized cadences of an agricultural way of life. Bells became an excessive noise when people claimed a right to silence and insisted on freedom from everyday rhythms. In 1908, the newspaper *L'Aurore* denounced "torture by bells," claiming that "nothing is more intolerable, irritating, and exasperating than the ding-dang-dong of the first masses of the morning."

There has been much talk lately of an intellectual and political malaise in France. No political party seems capable of providing a clear direction for the future; the days of the great "master thinkers" such as Sartre, Barthes, and Foucault are past; and even the grand new national library in Paris disappoints in its cold monumentality and its inability to deliver books on the same day that they are ordered. Alain Corbin's work belies this dreary prospect. It reminds us why French historians have long been at the forefront of their own intellectual life and of the international community of scholars. He carries forward the tradition of the great twentieth-century French pioneers in historical scholarship, Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch, and Fernand Braudel. He is not their disciple, but he brings to his writing the same deep sympathy for lost ways of life, and the same inventiveness in seeking methods for appreciating their particularities, without sinking into abstraction or sentimentality. ■

Mr. Lonelyhearts

By MICHAEL RAVITCH

Nathanael West: Novels and Other Writings edited by Sacvan Bercovitch

(Library of America, 829 pp., $35)

I.

FAILURE-HAUNTED IN HIS lifetime, Nathanael West could hardly have dreamt that his scattered works would one day be gathered together and preserved for posterity by the Library of America, or that sixty years after his death he would receive the imprimatur of the classic. We can imagine his shock, and his delight, and also his derisory laughter. Though steeped in literature, an aesthete to the bone, he loved to jeer at the official institutions of culture. He once told an interviewer that his first novel was written "as a protest against writing books." He described his early work as "vicious, mean, ugly, obscene and insane." Even though he eventually found a way to turn ridicule into a vehicle for compassion, his books still bristle with rage.

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MICHAEL RAVITCH is a writer and critic in New York City.

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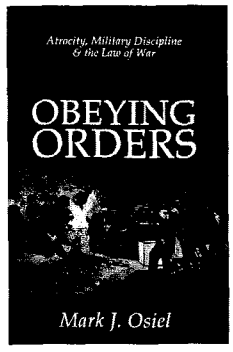

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decay." He ponders "a hundred million words, one after another, put down at great expense, at the cost of much suffering, gathered in ten thousand deliriums. The apocalypse of the Second-Hand!"

American literature might be described as one long battle against libraries. So much of our national energy and optimism derives from the perpetual quest to conquer the undiscovered territory—to break through the crust of tradition. But the time comes when the wilderness has been exhausted. How do you sustain a civilization on the promise of novelty? "Forget the epic, the master work," West advised the American novelist. "You only have time to explode." For West, America is pure anarchy: liberating and destructive at once. His own work, by this definition, is a thoroughly American product, charged with savage negations and brimming over with aesthetic vitality.

West was not the first observer of the American grotesque, but he envisioned the extravagant weirdness of American life in a deeply influential way. The parodic vaudevillians of Thomas Pynchon, the lonely obsessives of Don DeLillo, the fraudulent preachers of Flannery O'Connor—they all owe a large debt to Nathanael West. "America has her own religions," says the demonic newspaper editor Shrike in *Miss Lonelyhearts*, and from this insight, the rest proceeds: all the various manifestations of our indigenous hysteria.

West does not offer the satisfactions of a traditional novel. The textures of his imagined worlds are paper-thin, their inhabitants angular and crude. And yet, in the end, his characters come to life. They are never mere instruments for his ideas. The novels transcend didacticism; they achieve an unexpected intimacy. The infusion of personality is what makes them fascinating. The stories of impotence and fakery and violence, are, ultimately, stories about himself: the books "smell like the breaths of their author."

MAX WEINSTEIN WAS an immigrant from Lithuania who became affluent building apartment houses in Manhattan. His son, Nathan, was born in 1903, and grew up in the "gilded ghetto" of affluent Jews. They were raised far from the teeming Lower East Side of immigrant legend. On the high holidays they attended elegant Temple Israel, and that was it for Jewish observance. Eventually Nathan Weinstein changed his name to Nathanael West and is the first Jewish writer to be included in the Library of America (joined now by Gertrude Stein). How strangely appropriate that the first Jewish writer in the American canon should be—not an apostate exactly, but a man in flight from his roots. His novels do not depict the immigrant experience, like the writings of Delmore Schwartz or Henry Roth: but perhaps more profoundly, they enact the immigrant experience. He saw America with an outsider's scorn, but at the same time he cherished America as only an immigrant can. Buried within his bohemian scorn is the puzzled ardor of the would-be lover. His will to identify with the nation is evident in his choice of a new name: Nathanael, with its Puritan shadows, and West, as in the direction of America's perennial aspirations.

West ultimately did go west—to Hollywood, where he was able to support himself writing B-movies, and where he found the ideal topos for his vision of the inner life of crowds. F. Scott Fitzgerald, in *The Last Tycoon*, wrote about the aristocracy of the film business; but for *The Day of the Locust*, West looked to a much lower strata of society. He described the losers, the castaways, the aspiring extras and the has-been clowns. The restless hordes of California are not far from the desperate sufferers who write to the advice columnist in his earlier masterpiece, *Miss Lonelyhearts*. Yet while he writes about the poor, he never sentimentalizes the downtrodden. On the contrary: he makes fun of their hopeless aspirations and romantic delusions. They become prime material for his one insistent theme, the destructive potential of the imagination. His America is a world of miniature Madame Bovaries.

ALL HIS WORKS revolve around the danger of the dream. *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* consists of a series of dream-like encounters, in which the dreams all turn out to be parables of frustration. *Miss Lonelyhearts* is a meditation on "the business of dreams," how "dreams have been made puerile by the movies, radio and newspapers." Finally, in *The Day of the Locust*, West ponders the "dream-dump" of Hollywood, where he sees a studio lot as a "Sargasso of the imagination."

Although West is known as a writer of the 1930s, he never fit in with the earnestness of that decade. He did dabble in the Hollywood left; he involved himself in causes, such as the establishment of the Screen Writer's Guild, and at times he naïvely defended communist front organizations. But he was too suspicious of false rhetoric and clichéd romanticism to accept the language of commitment then fashionable. Hard-line leftists considered him decadent, and they were right. Having come of age in the early 1920s, he had been crucially influenced by the uncertainties of that more cynical era. Whatever his political sympathies, no ideal of improved social conditions could possibly

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survive the atmosphere of disillusionment that pervades his work. West found fakery everywhere, from the mongrel architecture of Los Angeles to the degraded language of contemporary belief. But he was not a traditional satirist, in the sense of someone proposing a positive alternative to a deplorable society. His satire was a way of representing a complex psychological state. The novels take on tragic depth as the accusations turn inwards: in the end, no one is a greater phony than the author, West, née Weinstein.

NATHAN WEINSTEIN compiled an amazing scholastic record. He failed nearly all his classes at every institution that he ever attended. He dropped out of high school without a degree, and when it came time to apply to college he simply fabricated his transcript. After being expelled from Tufts, a few months into his first semester, he managed to adopt the transcript of another Nathan Weinstein enrolled at Tufts. Using his doppelgänger's distinguished academic record, he was accepted at Brown with fifty-seven credits to his name.

Dada would have approved of this impressive hoax. But for West there must have been a deepening sense of his own fraudulence. At Brown he only wore Brooks Brothers clothes and soon acquired a reputation as a dandy and a gentleman. He started calling himself Nathaniel von Wallenstein Weinstein. The only thing missing in his quintessential college image was membership in a fraternity, but no Jews were allowed. Even if he wanted to forget that he was Jewish, no one else would. While he adopted identities and changed names with bravado, his work became obsessed with themes of spiritual emptiness and imposture. His masterpiece, *Miss Lonelyhearts*, is the story of a newspaper man who takes a job as an advice columnist, Miss Lonelyhearts. At first the whole thing is a joke, a hoax akin to the ones West liked to play: a man pretending to be a woman, a mockery of the saccharine pieties of the daily paper. But the letters affect Miss Lonelyhearts more than he expects. His spiritual crisis begins when he realizes "he is the victim of the joke and not its perpetrator."

Published in 1933, the novel received wonderful reviews, but the publisher went bankrupt, and all copies of the book were seized by a creditor. It was a bad stroke of luck, one of many for West. He never had literary success. He wrote to Edmund Wilson in 1939: "My books meet no needs except my own, their circulation is practically private and I'm lucky to be published." Throughout it all he desperately wanted to prove to his family that he could be a success. Certain anecdotes from his life lend him the pathos of one of his characters, such as his two year-long attempt to market a confection called "Cactus Candy."

In despair after the disastrous publication of *Miss Lonelyhearts*, West wrote a short novel called *A Cool Million*, a satire on the Horatio Alger story of success. Lemuel Pitkin, the naïve hero, sets off for New York to make his fortune, but instead is robbed and cheated, unjustly arrested, beaten, and exploited. Although at moments heavy-handed, the novel is wildly imaginative, *Candide* filtered through the Grand Guignol of Poe. Over the course of the story Lem Pitkin loses his eye, his teeth, his thumb, his scalp, his leg and finally his life, but he never loses his hopefulness and his gullibility. The poignancy of the novel lies in his dogged optimism. In general, West reserved his mockery for his most painful identifications. He tortures his hapless surrogate like a voodoo doll; in the end, what comes across most clearly is West's disgust at his own failure.

A Cool Million demonstrates West's sharp eye for the hollowness of American life, the way everything authentic becomes a platitude, packaged and commercialized, converted immediately into a spectacle. When Lem Pitkin arrives in New York, he discovers his humble Vermont homestead transplanted whole to the window of a Fifth Avenue design store as an example of "authentic" colonial architecture. Later the owner of that store appears as the designer of an absurd multicultural bordello, a proleptic satire on Disneyland as whorehouse. Further on, after being scalped by a revolutionary Indian chief who quotes Spengler and Valéry, Lem exhibits his scalped skull in a sideshow as the "sole survivor of the Yuba River massacre." This is American history chopped up into nonsense, revealed as show business.

Nathanael West has more in common with the Marx brothers than he would have liked to admit. His closest friend, and brother-in-law, S.J. Perelman, wrote several Marx Brothers movies; Perelman, like West, was a brilliant and compulsive parodist who wields imitation like a weapon. West claimed not to like Jewish stage humor, but his work has the slapstick quality of vaudeville, and clowns appear over and over. Poor mutilated Lem Pitkin ends up playing the "stooge" in a vaudeville show; it is his role to get beaten up. And Harry Greener, the most memorable character in *The Day of the Locust*, cannot even allow himself to stop performing on his deathbed. He reached the peak of his stage career as a "bedraggled Harlequin" abused by a troupe of Chinese acrobats.

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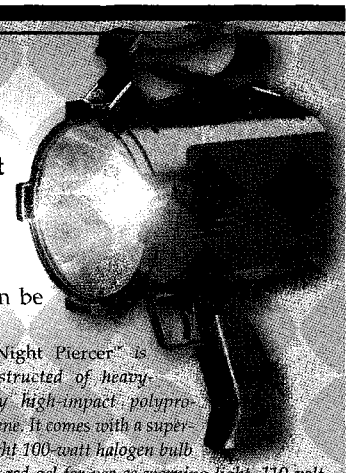

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Harry employs parody to fend off the world's blows:

> Now he clowned continuously. It was his sole method of defense.... He used a set of elegant gestures to accent the comedy of his bent, hopeless figure and wore a special costume, dressing like a banker, a cheap, unconvincing, imitation banker.... His outfit fooled no one, but then he didn't intend it to fool anyone. His slyness was of a different sort.

Vaudeville was not invented by Jews, but Jews dominated the theatrical business, as well as the motion picture industry. Almost no one in a Nathanael West novel admits to being Jewish, but the Jewish intonation is everywhere. Jewish names pop up in the oddest places: the Indian chief Israel Satinpenny, the Fifth Avenue decorator Asa Goldstein, the official fascist coonskin tailor Ezra Silverblatt. The joke here is about authenticity, national or ethnic. Nothing is native, not even the natives; everything is borrowed and mongrel. "We're not fake Europeans," Shrike insists, and yet Los Angeles is filled with "Mexican ranch houses, Samoan huts, Mediterranean villas, Egyptian and Japanese temples, Swiss chalets, Tudor cottages." West laughs at cultural pretensions and at the same time pays tribute to the ersatz. One of the funniest scenes in *The Day of the Locust* is the "Charles H. Grotenstein Production" of *Waterloo*. West finds in Hollywood's outrageous unreality a general truth about America's fantastical essence.

The greatest mistake about Nathanael West is to view him as a moralist, scourging the impurities of American life. In fact, he delights in them. Or more exactly his disgust is never far from delight, and his deploring is always a form of celebration. Phoniness may infuriate him, but his camera likes absurdities. Only bizarre phenomena inspire him; only then is his sense of aesthetic discovery palpable.

In another of the newly published short stories, West imagines Sancho Panza and Don Quixote as two voices singing a duet inside an ordinary man named Mr. Potts. His hometown, Pottstown, is a garden of delusionary wishes—the local men go on hunting expeditions despite the absence of game in the area; they wear mountain climbing outfits and yodel, undisturbed by the dearth of mountains. But Mr. Potts eventually decides to leave behind the fantasy-land of America; he attempts to climb the real Alps in Switzerland—whereupon he discovers that "Switzerland is nothing but a fake—an amusement park owned by a very wealthy company." The most revealing moment in the story is when garish Mr. Potts bursts cheerfully into the dining room of the Palace-Ritz Hotel, and shouts "Howdy!" to the gathered European aristocrats. They ignore the intruder, returning haughtily to their food, yet West unexpectedly sticks up for his hero: "They were shocked by what they thought was vulgarity, but what was really vitality." West might have believed that "wishers were ever fools," as Cleopatra puts it, but, in the end, he placed himself firmly on the side of the fools.

Tell the People

Roosters sing.
A woman teaches a child the Greek alphabet.
A small sparrow defecates.
In front of the window a flock of birds is flying.
MacGregor will go to Ljubljana as my messenger
at two o'clock. What am I doing
with this Australian kid?
April 13, 1978, on your birthday, I will
be in Zagreb, on Ilica, in the Café
under the skyscraper at 10.30 AM.
"Under my arm I will have sandals for
David, Ana, and you."
Zagreb is my native town.
If you're not there, I will go
to Salata, in front of the house where I was born.
My wife was fighting for me very hard.
She almost killed two people,
Peter Trias and Ron Donovan.
Ron is here now. He came from Alaska,
where he was a fisherman and a carpenter
all those years. He had written a poem
in Knossos, the first after the one he wrote
in Pisa in 1970, when we first met.
I was living in the hotel Ariston
near the tower. When Maruska
came to Pisa she didn't find
either the tower or my house. It took her
two hours to drive around town, in a kind of
death dance. Ron was waiting eight years.
Wherever I go people fall for me.
Here in Paleochora we live as Gauguin
and Van Gogh lived in Arles.
I cannot translate anymore.

Tomaz Salamun

—translated from the Slovenian by Phillis Levin and the author

II.

BEFORE THE FACT may be the first screenplay to be collected in the Library of America. It is not a shining example of the art. Although West had evidently mastered his craft, he had no particular gifts as a screenwriter. Even worse is his one play, *Good Hunting*, which closed after two dismal performances, but not before consuming most of West's savings. It is hard to know why these scripts should have been included here, other than to bulk up his slender oeuvre and to remind us of his frantic attempts to stay afloat financially. West had no pretensions to be a cinéaste: "I write grade C scripts only," he told a friend. He worked on such forgotten classics as *Ticket to Paradise*, *Follow Your Heart*, *Gangs of New York*, *Ladies in Distress*, *Orphans of the Street*—the latter recounting the adventures of little Tommy Ryan and his dog Skippy.

Ironically, though West may be our most famous novelist-screenwriter, his novels are fundamentally uncinematic. For a start, they have weak plots: the episodic narratives sputter forward on waves of choked feeling. Moreover, his characters are caricatures, and their distortion is part of their vividness. It is almost impossible to visualize them, except as cartoon characters, or perhaps as faces from Goya. They have internal force, but no external truth. In terms of visual description, we only know that Shrike has a "triangular" face, but in the stunning rhetorical thrust of his monologues, he acquires a larger-than-life eminence.

> I am a great saint. I can walk on my own water. Haven't you ever heard of Shrike's Passion in the Luncheonette or the Agony in the Soda Fountain? ... Under the skin of man is a wondrous jungle.... In this jungle ... lives a bird called the soul ... Taxidermy is not religion. No! A thousand times no. Better, I say unto you, better a live bird in the jungle of the body than two stuffed birds on the library table.

Shrike could not be represented

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through any naturalistic medium without losing his weird grandeur—it would be as ridiculous as an actor playing Beelzebub in a Grotenstein production of *Paradise Lost*. The final obstacle in adapting West for the screen would be that all his characters talk ironically. Some speak in quotes deliberately, as a joke; others borrow their language unconsciously, from the radio and the movies. His heroes find that they cannot speak sincerely, even when they try. Language is hopelessly corrupted; genuine feeling is blocked. The atmosphere is claustrophobic with cliché.

West's first novel, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell*, reads a little as Baudelaire might have written it if he had been one of the Marx Brothers. It is a strange, furious book, animated by anger against a world of second-hand feeling and borrowed experience. The story begins with Balso Snell, aspiring American poet, climbing into the anus of the Trojan horse. Balso is oddly helpless. Even his dreams are no longer his; they are colonized by other writers. This is a world where it is impossible "to tell where literature ends and I begin." At one point, lost in the labyrinth of equine intestines, he encounters the biographer of the biographer of the biographer of the biographer of Boswell: the very apex of unoriginality. The Trojan horse, both monument and trap, has the same monstrous quality as the library—there are so many other voices that Balso loses his own power to speak. "The wooden horse, Balso realized as he walked on, was inhabited solely by writers in search of an audience."

Balso Snell is a book about aspiring to be a writer and not knowing where to start. In the unpublished short stories which follow, visions of failure multiply. "The Imposter," for example, tells the story of Beano Walsh. On the basis of his "marvelous hands," the Hahn foundation has awarded Beano a grant to live in Paris and make sculpture. The joke is that Beano cannot sculpt anything: he has no talent whatsoever. "Whatever it was he saw in the stone, he couldn't chop it free." West returns over and over to this particular kind of failure, the paralysis of the imagination.

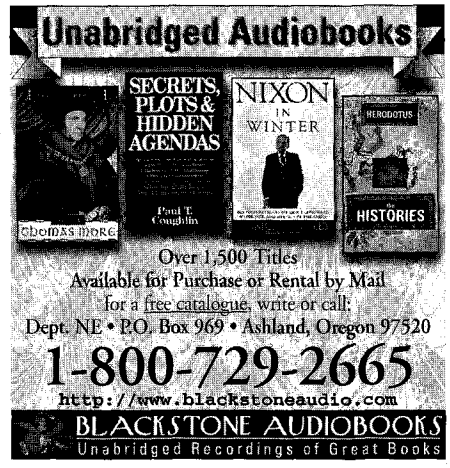
When we first meet Miss Lonelyhearts, he is staring at a blank piece of paper, unable to finish his column. *Miss Lonelyhearts* has been interpreted through the light of a thousand theories, Freudian, Marxist, neo-Christian, and so on. We might start afresh with the simple observation that he is a writer, a writer who cannot write. He has lost faith in words; words fail him. His ironic fate is that he is condemned to listen. Readers besiege him with their stories. And, aesthetically speaking, they outdo him. His consolations are only worn-out phrases, but the letters, though fumbling and inarticulate, are fiercely eloquent. The most famous is the unhappy sixteen year-old girl named "Desperate."

> ...I would like to have boy friends like the other girls and go out on Saturday nites, but no boy will take me because I was born without a nose—although I am a good dancer and have a nice shape and my father buys me pretty clothes.

How can we separate the pain from the humor here? We can't help laughing at "Desperate," partly because she imagines that a pretty figure could compensate for the absence of a nose, but mostly because her misfortune is so grotesque, she burlesques misfortune. What makes the letters most painful is the trust their authors place in Miss Lonelyhearts, and their eager expectation that he will be able to solve their insoluble miseries. "Ought I commit suicide?" asks "Desperate" politely at the end of her letter.

Miss Lonelyhearts is the story of a young man trying to come alive. "How dead the world is," he thinks, "a world of doorknobs." He stares at a wooden statue of Christ on the wall, hoping it will spring to life. He ponders his own coldness. "Like a dead man, only friction could make him warm or violence make him mobile." He is stuck; he cannot change. Like his friends at the speakeasy, he had once "believed in literature . . . in personal expression as an absolute end," but having lost faith in himself, he has become a "spiritual cripple." The ruthless aesthetic economy of the novel emphasizes the feeling of being trapped. Human feelings drain into symbols with the insistence of a hallucination: Miss Lonelyhearts is a rock, Betty is a party-dress. The images are relentless and circular. In a lyrical writer such as Virginia Woolf, visionary language will take wings on an expanded moment of perception—an epiphany, a moment of clarity and truth; but in the case of Nathanael West, the visionary moment is shrunk into a terse image—reduced, compressed, withered in its contempt for words.

Tod Hackett, the hero of *The Day of the Locust*, is another artist manqué: a painter who has sold out. After studying art at Yale, he has become a set designer in Hollywood. His intellectual friends fear that he will never paint again. The plot of the novel, in so far as there is one, is the story of a painting ("The Burning of Los Angeles") and how different encounters feed into his conception of the painting. Of all West's characters, he is the most successful artist and



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yet the least sympathetic protagonist. He does find a (non-verbal) means of expression, but there is a corresponding loss in vitality. Tod—his name perhaps echoing the German for death—thrives on fantasies of annihilation. He is not as interesting or intense as his nameless predecessor, but he surpasses Miss Lonelyhearts in one respect: in his imagination for collective violence.

The Day of the Locust derives its title from the terrifying description of an army of locusts in Revelations. "The noise of their wings sounded like the racket of chariots with many horses charging. Their tails were like scorpions' tails, with stings, and with their tails they were able to torture people for five months.... When this happens, people will long for death and not find it anywhere; they will want to die and death will evade them." Hackett wants to paint the "people who come to California to die," the bored and restless mob, grasping for excitement. But he is not so different from them. He has the same relish for violence and apocalypse. Standing at the top of a hill, looking down at Los Angeles, Hackett imagines "the city burning at high noon." He attends services at various weird Hollywood churches in order to sketch the worshippers: he appreciates their "awful anarchic power." At one point he even admits that he suffers from the same "morbid apathy" he likes to depict in others. After a vision of America convulsed in civil war, "he was amused by the strong feeling of satisfaction this dire conclusion gave him. Were all prophets of doom and destruction such happy men?"

Hackett's longings are finally satisfied by the famous riot at the movie premiere, West's finest set piece. What makes the scene fascinating is Tod's perverse fulfillment. The riot provides the release for which he has yearned. "Spasms" and "surges" pass through the intensely sexual mob, and he is not the only one to become excited. A man in horn-rimmed glasses molests a girl. People joke about ripping up a girl with scissors. Just as Tod had predicted, the apocalyptic violence takes on a holiday atmosphere. The language here irresistibly recalls the ending of West's first novel, in which Balso Snell's orgasm is described as an army moving through his body. "The army of his body commenced a long intricate drill.... His body screamed and shouted as it marched and uncoiled." Similarly, the sensuous description of the surging crowd might be read as an extended projection of a process internal to Tod Hackett: "He was the spearhead of a flying wedge when it collided with a mass going in the opposite direction ... As the two forces ground against each other, he was turned again and again, like a grain between millstones...." His sexual and emotional riot is painful but in the end generative: in the midst of chaos, Hackett ponders his painting and, for the first time in the novel, he imagines it whole.

ONE DELIGHT OF this new edition of Nathanael West is stumbling upon wonderful passages in forgotten works, such as the speech of Chief Israel Satinpenny in *A Cool Million*. The chief protests the "surfeit of shoddy" which the white man has inflicted on this "fair, sweet land." He describes civilization as the proliferation of useless objects: fountain-pens, cigarette lighters, key rings, doorknobs. "Now all the secret places in the earth are full," he complains. "Now even the Grand Canyon will no longer hold razor blades. Now the dam, O warriors, has broken and he [the white man] is up to his neck in the articles of his manufacture." Flotsam piles up from novel to novel, a growing mountain of garbage. Tod Hackett comes upon the studio dumping ground for old scenery. Miss Lonelyhearts imagines building a gigantic cross out of marine refuse. Balso Snell wanders in the junkyard of civilization, overwhelmed by all the old stories.

The absence of history is a common charge against America. Henry James enumerated a famous litany of absences in his book about Hawthorne: "No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy ... no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country-houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins...." And yet, in the vision of Nathanael West, the problem turns out to be surfeit, not emptiness. There are too many books in the library; the language is stuffed with cliché to the point of being involuntary. Architectural style is exhausted: there is nothing left to discover. America is crowded with junk, overwhelmed by remnants of a past which can't be washed away.

The immigrant is the ideal representative of the dream of self-invention. But the new man who appears out of nowhere with his newly coined name is not generated *ex nihilo*. He is always leaving behind him a very specific past, such as, in West's case, a father who spoke with an accent and failed in business and dropped dead on the job, and beyond that father, an entire culture, which cannot, for any person of imagination, be expunged by a mere change of name. The ghost of the submerged past, forgotten and banished and only floating to the surface as cultural detritus, stirs at the core of West's novels.

On only one occasion does West venture into explicit autobiography. In "The Adventurer," he reminisces about a childhood spent in Central Park, and almost immediately goes on to disparage the value of remembering: "Memories pile up, hindering action, covering everything, making everything second-hand, rubbed, frayed, soiled... The trail becomes hard to follow, not grown over, but circular, winding back into itself, without direction, without goal." The "apocalypse of the second-hand" recurs, but as a crisis of the individual, not the culture, a Wordsworthian problem rather than a Spenglerian problem. "It is only later," West writes. "Never further, never nearer." Here is the authentic despair of West's heroes, tragic because they cannot go backwards or forwards, because they cannot develop or change.

WEST, ON THE other hand, finally seemed to find a way out. In April, 1940 he married Eileen McKinney, the heroine of Ruth McKinney's book *My Sister Eileen*. By all accounts, their marriage was a great success. They furnished their home in colonial style. They went hunting together. They talked of having children. West had never been happier. And then, on December 22 of that same year, after a weekend of hunting in Mexico, he drove through a stop sign in a little California town called El Centro and straight into another car. Both he and his wife were killed. His ashes were shipped to a Jewish cemetery in Queens, in the Weinstein family plot, between his mother and his sister.

We can only speculate about the novels West might have written if he had survived. The specter of those imaginary works hangs over this volume. What do we imagine? A mellow West? A post-Holocaust West? A West in full possession of his powers? Or perhaps a hack screenwriter who could never equal his early triumphs? At any rate all we will ever have of West is here: bitter, uneven, youthful, brilliant, his innate darkness accentuated by his final tragedy.

America has no Westminster Abbey, no Père Lachaise, and perhaps it is better that way. A fine new edition of his work is the best monument a writer can ever hope for. Still, amidst the imposing marble tombstones with their grand Hebrew inscriptions, the small granite stone marking West's final resting spot seems a bit paltry. "Son" reads the epitaph, and then: "Nathanael W. West husband of Eileen." Ivy covers the mound. One story has it that his friends secretly buried his gentile wife's ashes in his coffin, in violation of the regulations of the all-Jewish burial grounds. A final gesture of defiance toward his people? In any case, like it or not, West lies among the Jews, now and for all time. ■

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The Golan Heights

To Whom Do They Belong? Can Israel Survive Without Them?

Syria's president, Hafez Assad, has apparently "consented to discuss peace" with Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak, provided that Mr. Barak agrees to start negotiations where (allegedly) the late Prime Minister Rabin left off four years ago. Astonishingly and regrettably, Mr Barak seems to have agreed to this presumptuous imposition.

What are the facts?

Historical Background—The Golan was always part of the Jewish homeland. The Syrian claim to the Golan is tenuous. Syria, as a political entity, did not exist at all until after the first World War. Until then it was just another province in the Ottoman empire, with ill-defined borders. In 1923, in an Anglo/French great-power play, the border between Syria and what was then called Palestine was established. The Golan Heights were ceded to Syria.

Even before the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Syrians, having heavily fortified the area, subjected the villages in northern Israel to almost daily shellings, making normal life impossible. In the 1967 Six-Day War, Syria attacked Israel and was defeated. Israel occupied the Golan Heights and in 1981, for all practical purposes annexed them.

Syria and its President—Syria is the most destabilizing influence in the Middle East. It is classified by the U.S. State Department as a narcotics-dealing and terrorist state. Its main fury is directed against Israel, which is perceived as a bulwark of Western influence and civilization, both of which Syria totally rejects.

Syria's President, Hafez Assad, is a tyrant, every bit as ruthless and cunning as his Iraqi counterpart, Saddam Hussein. Under Assad, Syria is a world center for terrorism. It still harbors Nazi bigwigs, who found welcome there after the World War. Few doubt that he was the mastermind and final authority in the suicide attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut in which 241 Americans died, and in the explosion of Pan Am flight #103 in which 270 people lost their lives. He oversees one of the largest narcotics operations in the world.

Military Security—The Golan is the size of the New York borough of Queens, about 10 miles wide, with a plateau on either side of a ridge. If it were part of Syria it would be less than 1% of its territory. But it is of a supreme strategic importance to Israel. Its high ground provides early-warning capability, without which Israel–just as in 1948, in 1967, and in 1973–would be subject to surprise attack by the Syrians. Its loss would obligate Israel to stay on constant alert and to maintain a state of readiness and mobilization that would be economically and socially untenable. The Golan, which ranges up to a height of 2300 ft., dominates the Jordan Valley, the lowest point on earth about 700 ft. below sea level. On the Golan itself, there are only two natural terrain bottlenecks through which tanks can advance. Those choke points are defensible and made possible the repulse of 1400 Syrian tanks that attacked Israel in the 1973 war. But with the Golan in Syrian hands, and without the radar installations that would give Israel warning of any military movements, thousands of tanks–backed up by missiles and airplanes–could overrun Israel in a matter of hours. It would be a strategically impossible situation, especially for a country as small as Israel–smaller than Lake Michigan, smaller by half than San Bernardino County in California. The Golan does not make for perfect defense, but it gives Israel a small breathing space for mobilization.

> "With the Golan in Israeli hands, attacking Arabs could be confident of defeat and peace would be preserved. To hand the Golan to Syria is a prescription for war and for Israel's destruction."

The Golan is the source of over one-third of Israel's fresh water. In 1964, with the Golan in Syrian hands, Syria attempted to divert these headwaters and to cripple Israel's water supply. It is more than likely that, given another opportunity, Syria would once again attempt to destroy Israel's water supply.

In its keen desire to bring peace to its people, after more than fifty years of war and bloodshed, Israel has been prepared to make far-reaching concessions to Syria on the Golan, in exchange for real peace. But it is hoped that even Ehud Barak, Israel's recently-elected prime minister, will not be prepared to give up all of the Golan high ground and to return to the "death trap" borders of 1967, or anything close to them. In order to survive within such borders, Israel would have to rely on the goodwill of the Arab states, most of which—with the recent exception of Jordan and of the cold peace with Egypt—are still in a declared or undeclared state of war with Israel. An aggressor will attack only if confident of victory. With the Golan in Israeli hands, attacking Arabs could be confident of defeat and peace would be preserved. To hand the Golan to Syria is a prescription for war and for Israel's destruction.

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Class Dismissed

AS I WAS DRIVING MY 16-year-old daughter, Hilary, to work one day this summer, I noticed that she was writing a letter. The letter was to Jeff Schultz, who had just resigned as director of the Leadership Training Institute (LTI) at John F. Kennedy High School in suburban Montgomery County, Maryland. Schultz was to be feted that night by the LTI students and their parents. Hilary participated in the LTI program but could not attend the party, so she was writing Schultz a good-bye letter. When we stopped at a red light, I realized that she was crying.

JEFF SCHULTZ AND A GROUP OF LOCAL parents began LTI in 1993 in order to stem what they called "bright flight." The most promising students in the area, black male students in particular, were fleeing Kennedy for magnet and private schools. "We were losing the cream," Schultz said. At LTI's start, the program enrolled about 200 of Kennedy's 1,300 students, but its goal was to include the entire school: Kennedy would become LTI. Students in LTI had to maintain a B average, but the program was not primarily about academic excellence. LTI students were required to perform a total of 200 hours of community service, to hold a related job internship during their senior year, and to carry out a senior project focused on helping the surrounding community. "We were not trying to make people into CEOs but into citizens in the mold of Jefferson," Schultz explained.

KENNEDY IS LOCATED IN A RACIALLY integrated, middle-class area of Silver Spring, Montgomery County's second-largest city. Due to the county's skewed housing policies, the area has a heavy concentration of subsidized housing. As a result, Kennedy has a greater proportion of low-income students than other schools in the county and struggles to accommodate kids with radically different educational and social needs. Some classes in the high school resemble those in the worst D.C. schools. But, unlike some honors programs, LTI was not supposed to be a refuge for the best and brightest. It was supposed to transform the entire student body.

LTI FLOURISHED, THANKS TO SCHULTZ. During its first two years, the program got small grants from the University of Maryland, and then the Montgomery County school system stepped in. But, in 1996, the county appointed a new principal at Kennedy who didn't seem to like the program. The principal, Sheila Dobbins, capped LTI's enrollment at 200, and then, having undermined its egalitarian purpose, complained that it was elitist and didn't include enough minorities. She insisted that Schultz gain her approval for what had been standard LTI meetings with parents and students. She increased the workload of the LTI teachers, including Schultz himself, who had to find internships for his students and was supposed to be planning the program's expansion. According to Schultz, she diverted county money that had been directed to LTI into other school programs. Over the past few years, several top LTI teachers quit, and this year, to the immense sorrow of my daughter, so did Schultz. "I was beating my head against the wall," he said.

DOBBINS DISAGREES WITH THIS CHARacterization of her actions. She concedes that she slowed implementation of the LTI plan so it could proceed at an "appropriate pace" and that she required Schultz to obtain her approval for teacher-parent meetings, but she says she did not divert funds from LTI and that the decision to increase teacher workloads was the county's. She also insists that she supported LTI. But, judging from my own limited experience—until I interviewed Dobbins for this article, I had never heard her express enthusiasm for LTI—and from the extensive testimony of other parents who were closely involved with LTI, Schultz, and Dobbins, I tend to believe Schultz. (On the issue of diverting funds, Dobbins seems at least to have taken authority over the funds' use away from Schultz.)

MANY SELF-APPOINTED EDUCATION reformers blame teachers' unions for everything that ails schools, but the problems I've encountered in my children's schools have more often been traceable to principals and the school administrators that appoint them. Earlier, my daughters went to a wonderful elementary school whose principal made a point of knowing each parent and attracted an extraordinary group of teachers. But, after several years, the principal transferred, and her successor was a woman whose job in central administration had been phased out. She was a control freak who saw any innovation as a harbinger of chaos. Our first warning sign came when she told my wife that she wanted to cancel the science fair. Later, the president of the PTA became very upset when the principal reprimanded a math teacher who had wanted to work separately with a group of several highly gifted students and ordered him not to teach anything outside the fifth-grade curriculum. After several years, most of the outstanding teachers had transferred, and the school went quickly from being one of the best in the county to being one of the worst.

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT BAD schools and their principals? Most parents in the PTA don't have the time to mount a full-scale campaign against principals who can spend entire workdays trying to outfox their detractors and who can usually amass the support of other administrators with a vested interest in the status quo. One step, which some school districts have already taken, is to establish a public rating system. But such a system would have to include individual schools and their principals and be based on parent and teacher ratings as well as on test scores. That might at least embarrass administrations into taking action.

THE SECOND STEP WOULD BE TO ALLOW parents to transfer their children to the public school of their choice. In Montgomery County, teachers can easily transfer between schools—with the result that a bad principal can destroy a good school in a year or two—but students are rarely allowed to transfer. With a program of school choice, bad principals would quickly be exposed as both teachers and students fled. Parents and students would benefit, but, if the funding followed the students, county administrators might have to take action to save some schools from being shut down entirely.

IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY, FOES OF school choice argue that it would result in massive white flight from Silver Spring to upper-class white enclaves such as Bethesda and Potomac. But the current system encourages a more corrosive and permanent form of resegregation by convincing parents that, in order to avoid schools like Kennedy, they have to sell their houses and move. Barely a month goes by when we don't hear of another parent, unwilling to subject his or her child to four years at Kennedy, moving out. These parents are not distinguishable from other parents by their race but by the ambitions they have for their children. Jeff Schultz, who worried about this kind of bright flight, understood that. It's too bad some principals and administrators do not.

JOHN B. JUDIS

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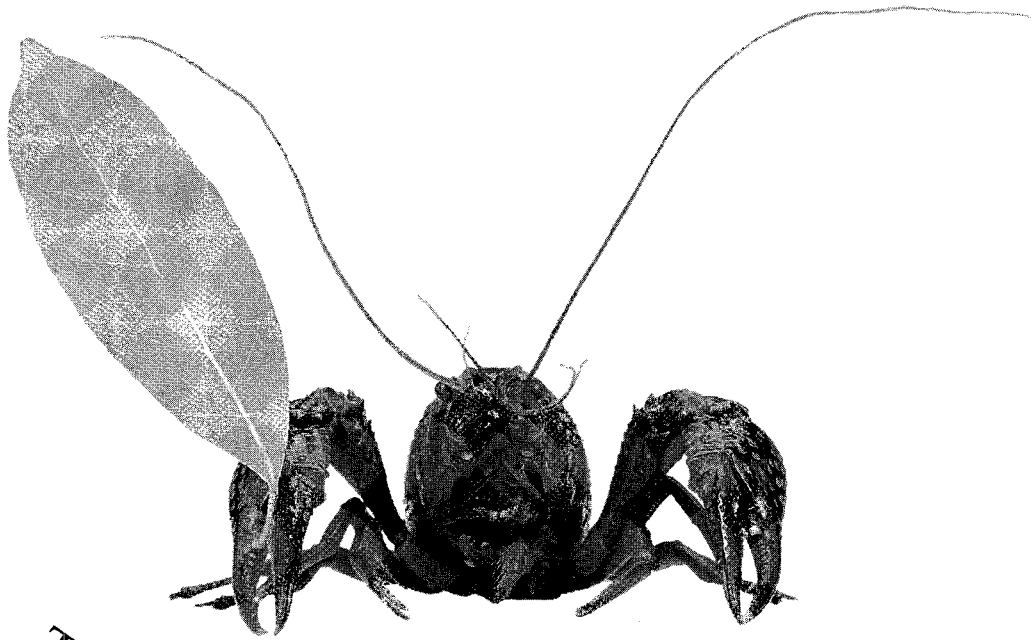
"More than 200 years ago, French-speaking settlers were forced to leave their land of Acadie, which the British had taken over and renamed Nova Scotia, and make their way to the wetlands of southern Louisiana. Here, without much notice, they built steep-roofed houses to slough off nonexistent snow and **adapted French cuisine to the crawfish** and muskrat they found in abundance in the pelican-tended swamps." — *The Almanac of American Politics 2000* on Louisiana's Congressional District 7.



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